MIND-TICKLER

JUDY COHEN

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THE MIND-TICKLER

by Judy Cohen

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The Last Mind-Tickler

JUDY'S STORY

Former trying-to-be-good girl. Former clinical psychologist. Former serial entrepreneur and business owner.

Former depressed, anxious, therapy-chasing, anti-depressant-taking, guilty, ashamed, suicidal despairer.

Former seeker of Self improvement and being Better.

Former Certified Facilitator of The Work of Byron Katie. Former Certified Senior Facilitator-Trainer of Scott Kiloby's Living Inquiries, and other various methods of self help via nonduality. *

Desperate to feel better. *(Duh)* For years.

Nothing worked more than briefly.

Eventually Judy came to see that the methods she was trained and certified in actually *perpetuated*, the *opposite* of helping to relieve, the sense of self as damaged.

She saw clearly that the sense of self was strengthened and maintained by all that methodology.

Along the way, several awakening experiences happened. But they were never Judy's goal or interest, and really she didn't care. She wanted only to feel better.

And contrary to popular myth, these awakenings didn't put an end to unpleasant feelings.

So then, all the seeking, all the inquiry, the desperation to improve and feel better and shift, was for... well, *what,* exactly?

Eventually Judy realized: What if *every* experience was an awakening? What if she could give up seeking because... This. Is. It.

And if that was so, then... what could any teacher or technique give her that wasn't already here, that she didn't already have?

So? Judy ditched it all.

All the certifications.* All the seeking, the hope of "better", the self-fixing. All the certainty that "Judy" is a real thing.

She began to think for herself. Questioned everything. Got herself out of the way.

Judy saw that every experience- good, bad, happy or sad- is an awakening.

She knew to give up seeking because there was nothing more to get. She'd had it all along.

She began to help others...

- Find their *own* ways to disrupt the mind's lies and lighten up their world.
- Discover how problem-making in any form perpetuates itself and the Self.
- See that they can be flawed, imperfect humans... *and also not* broken.

Bye-bye, unhappy box. Bye-bye, illusion. Bye-bye, dream-person.

Hello, broken spell. Judy Cohen had been Dis-Enchanted. Dis-Illusioned.

Ah, relief. Much more fun, this no-Judy-to-fix existence.

Though she's still here as Judy.

Of course.

See her? She's waving. 😊

Life goes on. Human continues.

Judy's so grateful to know this now.

And amazingly, happily, paradoxically...

That's...

Better.

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*Judy is no longer a Certified Facilitator of The Work of Byron Katie or a Senior Certified Facilitator-Trainer of Scott Kiloby's Living Inquiries.

PEOPLE HURT

January 16, 2016

People hurt.

Yes, even spiritual people.

People are depressed, anxious and sure there's something wrong with them.

For spiritual seekers, suffering can be extra painful because everyone knows that hurting is unenlightened, reaction is bad, and desires are a no-no.

I mean, truly awake people don't hurt or get triggered, right?

Of course. Everyone knows that.

So when triggering or pain does happen, that just proves how broken and hopeless we are.

Because being triggered is not cool.

Reacting supposedly indicates just how far we have left to go; how unenlightened and un-evolved we still are.

But what if that reactionless, desireless, never-afraid perfect you-that-feels-love-and-bliss only- what if that you simply isn't possible?

What if you never get there because that particular there isn't anywhere?

We are human. Humans feel. Humans react. Humans want.

That's never going away.

We live lives and deal with terrorism and screaming kids and global warming and love that leaves and computers that go black without backup and speeding tickets and death and illness.

Life goes on. Reactions happen.

Where's the problem with that?

And what real thing needs any of that to be one iota different, fixed or worked out?

Imagine how it would feel to not have to fix yourself or the planet.

Imagine all that free time just for experiencing life, as it is.

Ah.

BUT I DON'T WAANNNNT TO

April 5, 2016

Lately I've been working with a lot of people who struggle to get motivated.

I mean, there's a whole lot of stuff not getting done out there.

People stall on taxes, drag out launching the new business, don't write that book.

There's de-cluttering not happening, exercise not happening, homework not done.

Just leaving the house for chores or a walk is a big deal for some.

And forget about phone calls- so much stalling instead of calling.

I've yet to meet anyone who doesn't stall about something.

So as you think about the things you are not getting done, see if you can notice the fear involved.

With taxes the fear is easy to spot, isn't it? It could be fear about not being "good", and punishment.

Just not knowing how is scary too.

Or maybe the task seems to mean something about you. The inner voice might say something like, "Who do you think you are? You're so full of yourself to think you have what it takes to write a book, or start a business."

It might mean you are out of your depth, not smart enough, in over your head with something you're not good enough to accomplish.

And of course, other people could think something about you that you don't like.

Yeah. Better just sit there.

And you might also notice all the struggle for control- control of what you do, what you think, how you do it.

But do you actually have that control?

Do your attempts to boss yourself around succeed in getting you off the couch?

You're still sitting there, aren't you?

Maybe you're not in charge of this. Maybe whether you act or not is not up to you.

What if it's not your fault or doing that you can't get things done? What if it's a happening that's out of your hands?

I know that might seem crazy to the inner voice that says, "Well I have to be in control! Otherwise Nothing Will Get Done!"

But it's not getting done already, right? Even with the inner voice yelling at you nonstop.

That voice simply hasn't noticed it has no power.

So what would it feel like if you could see that you're a passenger, not the driver?

What if non-doing is not your doing?

What if it's not your fault?

Well, then, maybe then you can give yourself a break.

And shockingly, relaxing responsibility you don't really have anyway, might just relax all that fear of not knowing how.

Because it's terrifying to think you're supposed to know how to be boss of something you're not actually boss of.

So maybe that relaxing is just enough to open the door to peace.

And then things might just begin to get done. Without you.

Wouldn't that be something?

MY SELF, MY SUFFERING

April 12, 2016

It's miserable to be depressed or anxious, isn't it?

When we're in the middle of an emotional storm, we can't ignore that intensity. It demands attention and we want quick solutions.

"This feels awful. Make it stop! NOW!"

When we hurt, it feels like we must focus on the circumstances and the content of story. We spend countless hours stewing about how to fix the situation, undo the past, quit the addiction, get more money, win back the love, save the polar bears or get to better times.

We want "better" - feelings, situations, health, partners, parents, past.

Almost everyone wants a better "me".

That's how suffering very effectively draws our attention away from noticing that the self is just a story.

Attempting to make "better" happen, we may turn to anything outside ourselves. We're all familiar with this; it looks like every addition we've ever had.

We may not see that even therapy, inquiry, or the search for enlightenment are also solution-seeking ploys.

All of that better-seeking activity is very effective at anchoring and confirming a sense of self.

And that's exactly what all hurting and problems are there for- to occupy attention.

Because in the focus on the circumstances of hurting, the fiction of Self can remain unnoticed.

In fact, we often secretly cling to maintaining our suffering, because it's so effective at misdirecting attention.

We don't want to let suffering go. We think we do. But we don't.

Because we don't know who we are without it. And we're afraid to find out.

Which is exactly the point.

We urgently want to know who and what we are, to describe ourselves, and to maintain a description of a 'me'.

We say, "This feeling or situation means I am bad, I am smart, I am stupid. I am a failure, I am superior, I am inferior, I am unlovable, I am a fool, I am a victim, I am weak, I am lazy. I AM… I AM… I AM, I AM."

That's a whole lot of convincing that "I am" going on.

It's constant self-monitoring and self-description.

That's how we self-maintain.

Yes it does feel very real.

But is it?

What real thing needs to convince itself "that" it is, and *what* it is, all the time?

As suffering's role in maintaining the story of self is finally truly seen, it very often disappears like the vapor it is, taking pain with it.

And then we may be surprised to discover that relief comes much more easily than mind has let us ever believe was possible.

SPECIALLY BAD

April 19, 2016

Probably like you, I've done a lot of "inner work" throughout my life.

And yet...

Even today I sometimes catch myself thinking that I'm bad and unloved and fully deserving of that lack of love.

It is a constant vigil to not let that sad story of unloved self run away with good sense.

The thing is, everyone has a story that goes something like mine. Of course the details are completely different, but everyone thinks their childhood was dysfunctional and that their parents let them down in some way.

There's always some failure when it comes to parents.

Maybe they didn't understand or were unfair or didn't give us what we wanted or didn't do the right thing or did something that was definitely the wrong thing.

Sometimes people's stories are horribly, dramatically ugly, but even the ones where nothing all that terrible happened, hurt, and for most people, they hurt just as much as the bigger dramas.

Pretty much everyone has learned to view their past as broken and themselves as damaged in some way, and to think that they are failed and not right. Clearly something is wrong with them and needs correcting.

They are unlovable or too reactive, too needy, too shy, too scared, too sad, too angry. Too... something.

And— most people think they're the only ones who are flawed and irredeemable. Or certainly they are at least a much worse case than others, special in their badness or off-ness.

Which is why everyone is on a path of some kind, trying to fix what is broken, to improve, to overcome, to have more good, and to arrive somewhere better.

Everyone experiences this, because THAT is how the story of a separate, individual "Me" gets to perpetuate and never has to be seen as just a story.

So what do we do with this understanding?

Well, nothing.

Because (gasp) maybe nothing needs to be done.

Notice how it feels to even consider the possibility that you- yes you, with your past, your mountain of flaws, your terrible thoughts and feelings- are just like everyone else.

If you're too special to be ordinary, see if that's peaceful-making and satisfying, or if that feels off too.

if you are pining to be special, notice the feeling that comes with that yearning. Want more of that?

And then come back to consider …

What if you, just as you are, special-seeking as you may be, are not especially broken, not especially damaged, not especially a problem?

Now there's a concept.

See how that feels.

DO YOU BELONG?

May 10, 2016

Oh we do want to belong, don't we?

To be part of, included, to fit in?

That knowledgeable spiritual group, those pretty people, the moneyed successes, the work colleagues or higher ups….

Yeah, we want in.

We'll do what it takes. Act like they do, wear the cool stuff, say stuff we don't mean, spend money we don't have, be quiet when we disagree.

Watch all the self-conscious monitoring and effort to maintain alike-ness, in order to earn inclusion.

All that trying to be something we're not, just to get others say, "Sure, come in."

How likely is it that this is what the Universe / God / Consciousness / Nature / Source (pick your favorite word) had in mind for us?

The universe has created infinite variety and here we are trying to standardize and same-it all up.

Does it make sense that what's needed on this planet is 7 billion identical creations trying to be consistently alike, like McDonald's burgers?

What for?

What's the appeal in belonging?

How do we benefit, if we score us a great big batch of belonging?

Could it be that, rather than burgers, we're meant to be snowflakes, each bit of consciousness a distinctly unique experience?

Of course we're not "bits", but we very often experience ourselves as individual bits.

And yet as individuals, isn't it funny how hard we keep trying to be part of something, and not unique, not separate, not individual?

Isn't it funny how we keep striving to be part of something more than ourselves, something bigger, something more whole?

Maybe we're confused.

Maybe trying to belong is not necessary because we already do.

Here we all are, every one of us, offering consciousness that distinct one-of-a-kind experience that can only come from flawed, kooky, different, individual 'Me'.

Here we all are, belonging to humanity, fully and completely part of and included in the infinitely diverse vastness that is consciousness.

How can we not belong?

The ultimate belonging. Without the confusion of separate self, we see that it's already here, already attained.

We're in.

DON'T EVER DIE

May 17, 2016

Last summer I put my treasured kitty Muffin to sleep.

Such sadness. Such loss.

The vet put Muffin on my shoulder and I rocked her as she purred and the vet administered the fatal shot.

Muffin kept purring. Then the purring stopped.

And there was the little furry body, still on my shoulder.

But Muffin was gone.

So it was clear that that sweet body wasn't Muffin.

Because it was still there, and she wasn't.

Clearly Muffin, whatever she was, was not constrained by or trapped in or bound to that body.

When it comes to ourselves, often there's a strong idea that we're attached to this body. Most of us think that until we die, the meat suit is 'me' and there's no escaping it.

So we fear and run from death, avoid it intensely, and cry when it comes anyway.

Death seems to be the ultimate end of the self story.

But what if we have that wrong? What if we were never that story? And what if there is no end?

What if what we really are can't die?

I mean, can something that's not physical, die? How would that be possible?

And without the confusion of "I am this body," what separates whatever-WE-really-are from other people's whatever-THEY-really-are?

Without the body-is-me story, where does the real 'Me' end, and 'Other People', or Muffin, begin?

Alive or dead, what if what-we-are is indistinguishably and inseparably connected to what-others-are?

Wouldn't that mean that, realized or not, living or not, we're all already, *literally*, one?

So I sit here loving little Muffin. Because she is literally me, and how could we be any closer than that?

BE HERE NOW

May 31, 2016

Most people involved with spirituality want things to be different.

Yeah, there, I said it.

We want to get enlightened. We want to feel better. We want the thought storms to stop. We want to live right, do good, be good, and have the right life, whatever that might mean to us.

Goodness knows there is plenty of advice floating around debating whether it's possible to get what we want, if it's right to want that at all, and what to do to make it happen.

So many methods and teachers! We're rich in how-to's.

Inquiries, contemplations, meditations, ayahuasca, sitting with thoughts and feelings, allowing thoughts and feelings to be, practicing letting go and surrendering attachment...

Whew.

But... what if all that how-to-ing doesn't get actually us what we want and never will?

What if all that focus has led us astray?

Because what if the most basic assumption in all of that methodology is misdirected?

What if we are not The One Who Has A Thought or Feeling?

What if we are not The Noticer of the feelings and thoughts either?

What if what we are is feeling itself, thoughts themselves, colors, shapes, images, sensations themselves?

What if what we are is literally experience itself?

...This feeling and then this thought and then this one and then this one; each feeling / thought replaced by the next, just constantly changing experience...

If experience is what we are, then all the ideas about who or what we are, are just more thoughts.

And what if we are those too.

Then it doesn't much matter what thoughts are about or it they're true, does it? We're all of them anyway.

So then, if we're thinking itself- not the thinker, not the Witnesser of the thinker- then maybe there's nothing to do.

Maybe there's nothing to fix, no one to study methods and follow teachers, no one to improve, no one to inquire and no one to inquire about.

Because if we are experience rather than the thing that does the experiencing or the thing that witnesses, then we are not a THING.

We're non-existent. We're changing every second. We're everything. We're nothing.

Which means we- the person/personality named Judy or Ralph or Alice or Joe- we're no-thing.

Which also means we're not at fault, not responsible, not the doer, and flat-out not there to improve or fix at all.

We're off the hook.

See how that feels.

If it feels peaceful, relieving, even joyful, then why not go with it for a moment.

Maybe rest for just a moment with the peace of possibility that what we are is experience and nothing more.

Maybe figure things out and let thought take over and make itself and us a SomeThing That Needs To Be Improved, later.

For now, we might just BE, and enjoy getting what we want.

By doing nothing.

I LIKE THIS!

June 28, 2016

Think about all the things that happen in a day that you don't like.

We'll wait a moment; this will take a while.

I like chocolate. I don't like this song. Fear- don't like it. Money- like it. I don't like all the pain in the world. I like sleep. I like laughing. I don't like arrogance. I don't like this heat. Sadness, no. Calm, yes. I like art on the walls. I don't like her tone. I don't like wrinkles. I like bare feet. Feeling anxious, don't like it. I don't like the door closed. I prefer black to brown. I don't like bullying. I like nail polish. I don't like interruptions. I like shirts un-tucked. I like love, don't like unfairness, hatred, bias….

Well. It's nonstop, isn't it? It's a lifetime of constant evaluation. "This- yes! This- noooo."

We only want things and feelings we like, to happen.

We have an opinion about everything. We have an opinion about ANYthing.

It doesn't matter how small or insignificant the subject- freckles, length of eyelashes, size of body parts.

Sometimes we use different words, saying, "This shouldn't happen." Or, "This is good." We'll call it opinion or evaluation or judgment. They're all different words for the same thing.

It all comes down to, "I like this. I don't like this."

And yet, notice how much pain is caused simply by the thought, "I don't like this?"

And the idea that it matters if we like it... well, there's no peace in that.

So is it actually so all-fired important to like it? And does it matter?

Does not liking keep things from happening? Does it do anything but cause a frustration tantrum?

Like, does suffering stop because we disapprove? Does anxiety cease as soon as we determine, "Oh this is awful"?

Isn't it a great big, "So What," all this wing-flapping about preferences?

"I don't like feeling deficient!" Yes. What now?

"I don't like suffering!" Yes, absolutely. So?

"But I don't like that you don't care that I don't like it!" Got it. So?

Does it matter one iota whether we like it?

Funny we haven't noticed that it's irrelevant.

The mind hates that what we want doesn't matter. But it's clear that it doesn't matter.

So then what is the benefit of all this futile liking and not liking?

Well, it is in the preferences that we create the self story. We're defined by our likes and dislikes.

The story of who we are- the one who likes blue and doesn't like eggplant- is literally created via those preferences.

So it doesn't matter whether we like hot flashes or chocolate, or what we like, as long as we have a preference.

We can't escape it. This is a predominant way the Self story forms.

It's 'Me', maintained by yeses and nos.

That's why there are so many of them, and why we don't encounter almost anything that we don't have a like or dislike about.

Because the story of self is so ephemeral, so delicate, so fragile, that if liking/not liking were to let up for one second, well..

The mind is afraid of what would be left without them.

And what would happen if it was somehow possible to suddenly not have preferences?

Would we (as we know us) continue to exist? Would we turn into smoke?

Poof?

"I don't know what happened, Officer. She stopped having preferences and suddenly she was gone!"

I mean….

So is it necessary to not have likes and dislikes? Is it even possible?

All those spiritual leaders suggesting that preferences, wants, desires are bad.

Isn't that just a different way of saying, "I don't like having wants?"

Just more liking and disliking, isn't it?

So instead of one more thing we're supposed to fix about ourselves, maybe it's possible to just see all the self-ing going on with all those opinions.

And leave it at that.

Because odds are good that we will go to our grave liking or not-liking.

"Suffering and Deficiency and Wanting- Oh No! I. Do. Not. Like."

Yup.

Ok.

Next.

ENLIGHTENMENT

July 12, 2016

You want enlightenment, dammit.

You've read the books, heard the stories, seen the ones who seem to have something you don't have.

They have it. They got there. They tell their story and how they did it and how you can maybe too if only you do xyz.

But you? Not so much. Or maybe you got there and then lost it and now you're all about getting it back.

It's so painful thinking others have something denied to you, isn't it?

Maybe you've gotten tantalizingly close to what Eckhart described, or Nisargadatta or Ramana or someone on Facebook.

And then… Nope! Not for you today honey. Come back and try again tomorrow.

So we could talk about what all that trying does for one's life- whether it enhances or diminishes.

And we could talk about what enlightenment even is and if it exists or is even possible and if so, whether one needs to hunt it down and trap it like a wild animal.

Yes we could go there and in some upcoming Mind-Tickler we definitely will.

Because the assumption that there's something to get that they don't already have drives a lot of folks crazy with longing.

And for now…have you ever noticed all the variability in those many awakening stories? How so many people describe different experiences?

So many flavors!

Some say they experience bliss non-stop; they're peaceful, content, reacting never, smiling always. Some say it's a Shift that took them from place A to place B never to return again. Some say they were so present that they became one with the flowers and trees and lost the sense of where they end and the park bench begins. Some say through the embodiment of feelings they have transcended ego and humanness and self.

So many versions. So much certainty.

What's up with that?

Shouldn't there be one answer, one truth, one version?

Otherwise, how do you know what's real enlightenment and what isn't? :)

And in the interests of defending their one true version, have you noticed how many insist that all others are just wrong deluded stupidity?

Are they lying? Intentionally trying to deceive?

Well ok yeah, maybe some are. And some, maybe not.

It does seem that many truly believe that what happened for them was a significant event that should happen for everyone.

Which would make them believers.

And confused.

Because just like everything else on this planet- ideas, colors, flower petal shapes, voices -

Experiences vary infinitely.

Maybe no experience repeats.

Maybe enlightenment doesn't follow rules.

Maybe there are as many different versions of awakening as there are snowflakes.

So one person might share his experience fervently, as if it is the only possibility, and not see that having his experience duplicated millions of times by millions of people is not how things work on this planet.

He might try to teach others to replicate his experience. He might band together with others who have selected his version as THE version.

But try to replicate and copy a snowflake and teach it to be your version of snowflake instead of its own.

Yeah, not gonna happen.

Replicating can't be done. Nature doesn't produce duplicates.

You can try on some other snowflake's experience. You can recite that snowflake's lines.

But your version, your own experience? Only you can live that, provide that.

Individual snowflake you.

So if awakening is even possible, then it's awakening Your Way.

Maybe it shows up and vanishes. Maybe it lasts forever. Maybe the world shifts. Maybe you feel lots of love and bliss. Maybe it's experienced in bits and pieces a little here or there. Maybe it comes for a day, a week, 3 months.

You may come to see that there are countless versions of spirituality, countless versions of experiencing "The Truth."

You may find you no longer think there is A Truth, no right answer, no 'only way', no "True self" to awaken.

You may no longer look to teachers or others to help determine your own experience.

And you may discover, in no longer looking to others to show you the way, that you've already found your way.

Yes, already.

It's the only way.

THE MONEY TERROR

July 26, 2016

A whole lot of people are scared to death about money.

Not having any. Not having enough. Running out of what's here now and living out of a shopping cart under a bridge.

Of course you realize that if all the people who were afraid of being homeless actually ended up homeless, people would be stacked in chest-high piles in the streets. Which is not the case.

But never mind.

And omg where will more money come from? Clearly no one is hiring or clients won't come or the stock market won't recover.

There is absolute certainty that this is a real problem, a real danger.

Surely there's something that can be DONE to make money happen and ease this panic. Read up. Take internet courses. Make budgets and cut back.

Do everything but notice whether there is an actual problem.

Refuse to consider that maybe there's nothing you can do.

That feels too dangerous.

Nothing but doom can come of letting go of this particular problem.

Everyone knows this.

"I have to solve it!"

Interesting.

See how important that makes you?

How solid, how real?

How handy.

What if all that worry and panic is not really about money?

Yes, it does look like it's about money. But maybe it's not.

What if terror about money is just another way to solidify the self-story?

"Hi, I'm me, I'm (insert name here), I'm worried about money."

Okay, okay, stop rolling your eyes and just play with me a moment.

You've been fretting about trying to solve this situation for a while now, right?

Is it working?

Let's consider something different.

Maybe worrying about money is a trick, a deception, a ploy, of thought.

"Look over here at this disaster! Pay no attention over there, where you're safe right now. No no, over here, over here!"

Strategy.

It seems to all depend on YOU.

It feels miserable. But it does the job.

The me-story gets to survive. Unnoticed. On autopilot.

Because while the song repeats, "I need money I need money what about money danger danger money I need money," like an old cassette tape on replay,

repetition locks your attention into problem, solutions, fears, and ignores…

WHAT is in actual danger?

What needs to be in charge, do something, fix things, get money?

What needs money?

Point to it.

Is it that body? Elbows, heart, fingers? They don't care about money.

They don't care if they live or die either.

How about whatever it is that notices body, or that "sense' of Me- do they need money?

What for?

So…. what exactly is in danger, needs more, needs a solution?

Could it be… nothing?

I know when you're scared to death about money that this kind of talk seems like, "Look lady, don't distract me with this woo-woo crap. I have a real problem here."

But it could just be that when it's seen there is nothing here that has a problem and nothing to solve, options open up.

Without you.

Solutions show up. Solutions that don't involve you as the King Of All Answers.

Maybe you don't actually need to know how to solve things. Maybe it's not up to you. Maybe you don't need to know anything.

Maybe it will take care of itself.

Because the habit of focusing on oneself as real solid problem and solution all in one can get in the way of openness to something bigger, something not-me, something wiser and with unlimited options available.

It could be that when you notice how the thought, "I am the one who has to do something" creates a sense of ME,

you also begin to notice that money comes from surprising places, in surprising ways.

By itself.

It doesn't need you to run the show and figure things out.

An idea comes in the middle of the night, someone sends money out of the blue, a job appears out of nowhere, a new love turns into marriage, a relocation opportunity effortlessly arises.

When you're hyperventilating and thinking it's all up to you, you might fail to notice how answers show up on their own.

Yeah you might still be scared. Yeah you'll probably still be triggered by the sight of a bank statement. You'll probably still focus on disastrous-future thoughts.

That's what habits do. They repeat.

That may not be fun.

But it's also not the doom-filled end of the world.

THINGS AREN'T GOING SO GREAT

August 9, 2016

Ever notice how much unhappiness comes from circumstances and situations that are not to our liking?

Witness how unhappy we get in the face of sullen teenagers, disapproving bosses, lost friends, cancer, rained-out weekends.

Parents who let us down or disappoint? Ouch.

Uncooperative landlords, bad teachers, unkind strangers? No, no, no.

Romantic partner who cheats or doesn't care? Not. Happy.

We like things our way, and our way only.

We say, "No way I can be happy or OK with this going on."

And yet whether we like a given situation or we don't, things often don't go our way anyway.

You may have noticed.

We pout, tantrum, complain and project a ruined future.

We get depressed, isolated, suicidal, angry.

Attempting to limit disappointments and unhappiness, we place rules, obligations and requirements on experience.

"Come on, life. I should be healthy, thinner, younger. I need a loving partner. I need more money. I need friends. I need more time. I shouldn't

have to sit here for so long. They should love me. He shouldn't talk to me like that. I'm still not enlightened? Jeez, what's it gonna take?"

Gosh, are our likes and wants so important that everything - our peace, our contentment, our quality of life- depends on them?

And does it even make sense to have our satisfaction and OKness depend on constantly changing, totally uncontrollable circumstances?

I mean, not liking traffic doesn't make us happier. Not liking sickness doesn't improve sickness. Not liking the situation at work doesn't improve the situation.

It could be that these demands actually make us more unhappy and give us even more of what we don't want.

So instead of insisting that things go our way, we might just notice that we are actually, literally OK, even though the various current situations are happening.

Because aren't we?

Person sitting, standing, thinking, feeling.

Not much else going on, is there?

Even with the broken car, the lying friend, the lost child, what's not actually OK?

Just a feeling we don't like.

Displeased with situations or not, uncomfortable or not, OKness is here.

We can even see this for ourselves by just asking: What percentage of me is OK right now, even with this situation?

Whatever number we come up with, doesn't that amount of OKness count at all?

Do things have to be 100% to our liking, for whatever percentage of OKness to be enough?

You hear the petulance in that, right?

As if we pout enough we can make experience bend to our wishes.

But instead, experience does its own thing, its own way. Life and death happens as it happens, on its terms not ours.

So there will always be another unwanted situation, another problem, another "Noooo!"

In fact at any given moment there will probably be lots of complaints and "I don't like this!" going on.

We will never be problem or complaint free.

Things we don't like are going to keep happening.

So if we're dependent on conditions to be right to be happy, we're bound to be disappointed.

Because it's impossible.

That's why it doesn't make much sense to put contentment on hold while we wait for everything to be just right.

I mean, sure, we can wait for everything to fall into place before we are happy and OK.

But I can't imagine why we'd want to.

Because we'd be waiting a very long time.

And because really, why wait for what's here already?

FEELING BAD

August 30, 2016

I woke up this morning feeling bad.

As in sad, anxious, foreboding dread.

Hello old friends.

There used to be a time that I woke every morning with that same heavy feeling of misery and doom. Much of my life, really.

Happily it's been ages, years, since I've woken to these kinds of delights.

Surprise! They're baaaack.

Of course I'm not the only one who experiences some rough feelings, in the morning or otherwise.

Having worked with so many hurting folks, in the interest of help I thought I'd share how this all worked out with me today, what worked, what didn't.

Reminder one: Feeling states come and go.

I felt fine yesterday. And the day before. Early today? Not so much. Later today? Fine again. Tomorrow? Who knows.

Feelings blowing in and out, coming and going. Like leaves on a windy day.

Reminder two: Want reasons and explanations? Sure, ok. Just prepare to suffer.

This morning, there seemed to be no reason for this reappearance of misery out of the blue.

It was just suddenly there. And dammit, mind wanted a reason.

Surely there was a cause, a thought, something I could pin it on. There had to be an explanation.

Bad feelings don't just happen for no reason.

Do they?

So the thought-machine started right in. No warm-up, no easing in, no starting slow. Just BAM.

An immediate running through of all possible causes.

You know, the You Suck Life Sucks Litany List.

Stupid guilty loser unloved unlovable past shames childhood trauma failure too old too lazy too fearful too wrinkled trying too hard mean ungraceful ungrateful this friend that ex uncreative unoriginal nothing to offer unnecessary hard life bad breaks nasty bad too moody too reactive faking faker unkind smarts bad no future no relief no hope big mouth different weird no value not enough not enough not enough.

Situation A Situation B Situation C next time last time never always will be could be going to shouldn't.

Well.

That felt awful.

And all that crap came spilling up effortlessly fast, didn't it?

What the hell.

Reminder three: Thought has noooo trouble coming up with lots of stuff wrong… with me, with you, with the world, with life, with death.

Left to the thought loop, all is miserable hopeless problem in need of solving right now.

Oh mind was happily hating on me and trying to solve the awfulness of it all.

But … maybe that was all a trick.

Maybe the feeling was not about some "cause."

Huh. Could it be a "reason" wasn't even necessary?

I mean, maybe that feeling was just an innocuous occurrence. A passing through.

Like… buses. Wait long enough, this bus will leave and another will come along.

And… maybe thinking and feeling reactions were just a habitual this-is-what-we-do-now- it-means-nothing happening.

Is it possible?

What if thoughts and feelings were just habits, happening on autopilot?

Ding ding ding. 6 o'clock Monday. Time for heaviness.

Maybe all that stuff circulating in the personal growth sort-of-spiritual community about focusing on feelings, listening to them, sitting with them, feeeeeling them, has been making something habitual and meaningless to be much more important than it actually is.

Maybe rough feelings don't actually need a whole lot of attention or focus or reason or meaning assigned.

Yes I realize that's true heresy to some people reading this.

But sometimes heresy enables a way outside of boxes.

Which is how once again this morning I wandered into potentially spiritually incorrect territory.

Such as…

If this morning's heaviness was just habit, then what had a problem with it?

What needed it to change?

What labeled it "suffering?"

Whatever it was, was it Me? Not "Judy", but…

I felt into whatever it is that I really am.

(If you are playing along at home, be careful to not get caught up in letting mind define that just now. We could name it, but for right now it doesn't matter what "what I really am" is.)

And then I talked to it.

Yeah. I told you. Sue me.

I asked whatever-it-is-that-I-really-am if Judy was ok.

And then I listened.

And heard a yes.

I didn't care where that answer came from.

Yes I have explanations and maybe if you write me I'll share them, but again, it didn't matter. I didn't want to feed mind by getting diverted that way.

I hope you won't either, because that's a trick; mind has no intention of actually helping figure this out.

I asked if whatever-it-is-that-I-really-am had a problem with Judy feeling some heaviness like what showed up this morning.

Nope.

Did whatever-it-is-that-I-really-am need that feeling gone?

Nah. What for?

And I knew that the peace I experienced at that point, as Judy connected to whatever-it-is-that-I-really-am, was my indication of truth.

I was good with that.

The morning-heaviness bus had pulled out and left.

The peace bus had pulled in.

Next.

For those of you hurting today, I wish you the same connection with what you really are.

And peace.

SEEKING. HOW LONG?

September 6, 2016

Today's Mind-Tickler is brought to you by the words "Better" and "How Long?"

The other day a lovely 84 year old woman told me, "I'll never accept what my body looks like now. Never!"

In your own life perhaps there are also situations and feelings that Are. Not. Acceptable.

Which is fine.

Not much fun though, is it?

Whether it's unwillingness to accept what you look like, or loss of love, or a child's disrespect, or how little money is in the bank...

there are so many situations that seem like they could and should get better, if only you could figure out how to make that happen.

The thing is, how long do you want to keep trying?

So many things to fix and improve. You, others, money, feelings, personal behaviors and qualities.

How long does it make sense to keep at it; to keep chasing that something better?

How long is a reasonable amount of time to figure out how to get more money or more friends, a different body, more love, less addiction?

How long is the right amount of time to work on finally being a less deficient, less reactive, less depressed or anxious, younger, prettier, more successful, improved you?

Years? Decades? A Lifetime?

Whadaya say, let's just keep doing "Inquiry" for another 20 or 30 years.

Well, maybe keep at it until you and the world get just right.

When will it be enough, this fixing others or self or reactions to things; this trying to find "Truth" so that we're not "stressed"?

Maybe you've noticed it's a lifetime of dissatisfaction with what's here; a lifetime of hope, determination, insistence to get what isn't here.

So. Does it bring peace?

Sure, that's what This-Isn't-Good-Enough brings... "Peace."

Yeah, that's it.

But, what about enlightenment?

Surely there's no question that once attained, enlightenment will be better than this life you have now.

Right?

Surely seeking it is worth decades of dissatisfaction with what you've actually got.

Never mind that despite years of study, listening to teachers preach on YouTube, books read, endless meditation, quotes reposted…. it never seems to arrive.

Never mind that hunting enlightenment through Now-Is-Not-What-I-Want is simply illogical and impossible.

No. Instead, focus on the unhappiness that happens when others seem to have something you don't.

Yeah, let's focus on that.

For years.

Or maybe you had an awakening for a while. Whoo hoo! It arrived, Yay! And then, Dang! It went away, Boo. (a story clung to by an astonishing number of people).

OK.

So how much lifetime seems reasonable to invest in desperate yearning and seeking to get it back?

What do you think- one year, five years, twenty?

And even though it may seem like trying to get enlightenment to arrive or return must surely be a worthy quest …

Is striving to get enlightenment a more valuable pursuit than, say, striving to get money or love or anything else?

I mean, striving is striving, isn't it?

No matter what is being sought.

As long as chasing is happening, as long as dissatisfaction with what's present, is happening, it's all the same isn't it?

So… does it make sense to devote one's life to striving for better … anything?

And then here we are again, back to…"How long?"

When does what's here now become finally good enough?

When does an intense feeling, or that lack, or this craving, become enough, as it is?

When do we stop trying to beat ourselves or others or situations into change, into improvement?

Seriously. When?

Whether we like a situation or feeling or thought or not, do we never get to finally just say, "Ok, this seems to be it, might as well just say yes to it?"

Or must we fight tooth and nail and resist and insist and yearn and crave and cry with frustration…

Forever.

So. Lack of money? Well, ok. Cheating spouse? Sigh. Ok. Still addicted? Yeah, this seems to be the way for now. Pain? Yeah it's tough. And Ok.

Yes I realize this is alien to even consider. We're not used to it.

At all.

In fact, you might very well be saying "But No! I will not accept this situation! NO!", right now.

You might very well be still fighting and sputtering even just reading those words 4 lines above.

Like my 84 year old friend, fighting fighting fighting her aging body's looks.

Because though it's spiritually incorrect to admit, the truth is we don't like What-Is.

And it's also the truth that it doesn't matter one bit whether we like it or not.

So if instead, it was somehow magically possible to accept what's here- you, others, situations- as it is, and not try to better it…

Well then... what?

Can you see how completely different that would be?

How differently What-Is-Already-Here would be experienced, without the constant rejection of it; without the constant trying to improve things?

Can you see it?

I'm not saying you should to try fix or change the fixing or changing.

That would be more improvement going on, just applied to a new subject.

That's just more of the same.

I'm just saying maybe it's possible to simply notice, over and over, all the ways we strive for improving, bettering and fixing.

And then you might be able to discover and focus on what's actually here, instead of what's not.

Because who knows what might happen with that dramatic focus shift.

Could be nothing.

Could be everything.

Might be fun to find out.

For a change.

CHASING ENLIGHTENMENT

September 13, 2016

So many people have had awakening experiences and haven't written a book. So many have the experience of "I had it. And then I lost it."

In sessions and groups, I hear this over and over. Enlightenment is quite the tease it seems.

It shows up for a while, bringing the requisite peace, easy-going equanimity, the non- reactiveness, the bliss, contentment, all-abiding love.

Oh yeah! Life as it's supposed to be lived! We shall say yes to this sweetness.

Enlightenment has arrived. And so have you, now-enlightened one.

Until just as suddenly, on its own timetable and without fan-fair, after hanging out a few moments, hours, days, months, it slips off again.

Hey where'd it go? Adios enlightenment.

And then you're back to the same ol' judging, dissatisfied, thought-believing life.

Only now, you have had a tantalizing taste of sugar.

What person in his right mind wouldn't want to set about trying to get that back?

Although…. you can see the potential carrot-chasing that's instantly created, right?

There's a better yum out there; better than the everyday fare. You had it for a while. You want it back.

Chase chase chase.

Have you noticed what happens to the present, to what is here, with that craving operating?

"I know! Let's trash what is here and wait for /pine for /hope for the return of what isn't."

You can see the flawed reasoning, I hope?

We're talking about a dissatisfaction with what we have.

We're talking about a desire for better; nicer feelings, nicer thoughts, less ego, a moratorium on judgments.

That's really just business as usual with a fancier label slapped on it.

But c'mon, it felt so great! That nice feeling, that sweet sense of peace...

It's like a long lasting quiet sweet little orgasm.

Who wouldn't want that back?

But… we don't chase orgasms, trying to get back the one we (hopefully) had last week do we? (please say no)

Besides, orgasms don't last forever, do they.

In fact, does any good feeling stay forever?

Nah.

So if enlightenment is (or just comes with) a sweet feeling of peace, is that even supposed to last forever?

Everything on this planet comes and goes; nothing is permanent.

Why should enlightenment be any different?

Whether you consider awakening a point of view, an experience, an understanding or a feeling state, why shouldn't it come and go like everything else?

And then, notice that sense that you- with all your study and retreats and satsangs and meditating and extra-special giftedness or whatever- you can't help thinking that you made awakening show up to begin with.

And then, you failed. You blew it. You made it leave.

Ouch.

That's a whole lot of personal responsibility.

And a whole lot of You going on.

Oh the self-ness, the self-importance, the Self that's reflected in "I made this happen and I made it un-happen."

Powerful, important, all-revolves-around-you You.

And then there's all the meaning attributed to that experience arriving and leaving.

It means you did good, and then it means you did bad. It means you're missing out on the good stuff. It means you are being denied; others get to have something and you don't. So you are inadequate and incomplete.

So much "you" in that paragraph.

Even if it feels miserable, there's a lot of ego involved. All that you-ing, and the reflection of a solid, correctable clearly-there (duh) object of importance, power and control.

Interesting. And handy.

So….

Is it even logical that the experience of transcending self would make a self more important, more special?

Or might such reasoning instead confirm ego, just with a new label?

It's only a thought that says you made something happen, and you made it un-happen, and that your life is better when that enlightenmenty-happening is here.

Because the thing is, except for that thought, is it so awful- this life as it is?

Is *now* so awful?

Some of you reading may insist on a Yes to that question, and I hope you'll look again. Because "My life is awful. This sucks and I can't bear it…"; these are thoughts.

Thoughts can't be trusted.

And I realize that might be too hard for some to see or accept right now, and that's fine.

Either way, if enlightenment (or even just feeling better) is being chased, maybe for a moment you can see ….

you simply can't get what you're looking for that way.

So yeah, had an enlightenment experience and lost it?

Well, Ok.

Whether liked it or not, this right here…is What Is.

Right here. Right now. This.

As is.

The truth is you're powerless.

Experience comes and go as it pleases.

What would that feel like, I wonder, if it was ok to have the experience you're having now, as it is, without insistence that some other experience is better?

Could it be that in the acceptance of the present, with whatever feelings, judgments, behaviors and thoughts are here now…

that that acceptance is where what you're chasing, actually lives?

What if what you're chasing lives not in the grasping to get something else, or to get something back, and instead lives in This-is-what-is-here-now?

Because it's also true that once something is seen it can't be unseen. Which is yet another way of saying what you seek is already here.

Which would mean there's nothing to do, nothing to change, nothing to seek.

That would not be business as usual, would it.

Who knows, it might even be downright EnLightening.

"You spiritual people spend so much time trying to transcend. But if you knew how much concentration it took to turn energy into matter, you would quit trying to leave here."

~Physicist Fred Alan Wolf

SEX

September 20, 2016

Let's talk about sex, bay-bee.

Wait, what?

No no that can't be right.

We don't talk a whole lot about sex in spiritual circles.

We're all about the light, the upward, the transcendence.

If sex is discussed at all, it's about tantra and vast expansion and moving upward through the chakras. Or something.

It's not about the dark. Dark is bad. Dark is wrong.

Don't be talking about down and dirty naughty filthy sex.

This is taboo territory.

So many judgments, so many evaluations- right wrong, good bad, naughty nice, normal perverted, should shouldn't.

So much we're not allowed to do.

So much hidden and kept to ourselves.

So many secrets.

Ever wonder why?

What are we so afraid of, that sex has to be restricted, monitored, hidden and driven underground?

We might start by noticing the existence of all the monitoring, the self evaluations, the "How'm I doing" and "Do I like this" and "Do they like this" and "I'm such a stud" and "Can I do this" going on.

And we might notice that we're supposed to perform well, to be good at it, to last a long time, to take care of ourselves and the other (if we're lucky enough to not be playing alone).

And don't forget we have to look good doing it. "Do I look fat in this position? Does s/he think I'm hot? Look how big I am!"

And normal-we have to appear normal, not too weird.

Or we have to appear wild and crazy and not anywhere near normal.

But we have to appear as something.

Yikes.

That's a lot of requirements, isn't it?

A lot of self-monitoring and self-evaluation and self-identifying happening.

It's a miracle we get it on at all, with so much mental activity.

Most of which we hide. We're not sharing almost any of this with others.

Because it's the ultimate in personal.

It's person-al.

There's identity-making happening.

There's person-making happening.

"I am loved, sexy, wild, wanted, free spirited, daring, uncontrolled. I am a stud, a conqueror, a bad boy, a good girl, a victim, a weak-willied failure, a hot tamale."

Whatever the particulars, I am-ing is happening.

We see ourselves based on image making with our partners.

We see ourselves.

Although as a person-making process, does it work?

Does thinking "I am a hot babe" actually make one a hot babe?

Does it make one… anything at all?

Are we any more real just because we think I AM?

Does the existence of thoughts that say "I am..." prove the existence of Self?

Nah. That's like saying "See this idea of a fork? You can eat with this."

It's a description of a fork.

It's a description of a self.

That's not the self.

They're not the same thing.

So with sex here's this very physical act that would seem to be the ultimate way to prove the very obvious "Duh" existence of Me- the Self.

But it doesn't work.

So it could be that all the hiding, acting-out and fantasies are just designed to serve in our Self-story-creation.

To enable a sense of person.

Even though they fail to create an actual person.

Which is perhaps exactly what we're hiding; what we're so deeply ashamed of.

Perhaps this is the big secret we keep hidden in the dark, and the reason so much about sex is taboo.

So that we can make sure that that failure, that non-proof of a Self despite our very best physical efforts, doesn't get seen.

Because is a non-existent-self sexy or a stud or hot?

How could it be? What would want sex?

No, we don't want to go there. And if it's taboo we don't have to.

"Shhhh. There's nobody here. But let's pretend we're something and have naughty sex!"

Which is kind of a shame when you think about it. And ironic really.

Because sex might be a hell of a lot more fun if it didn't have to carry the burden of our entire personhood on its back.

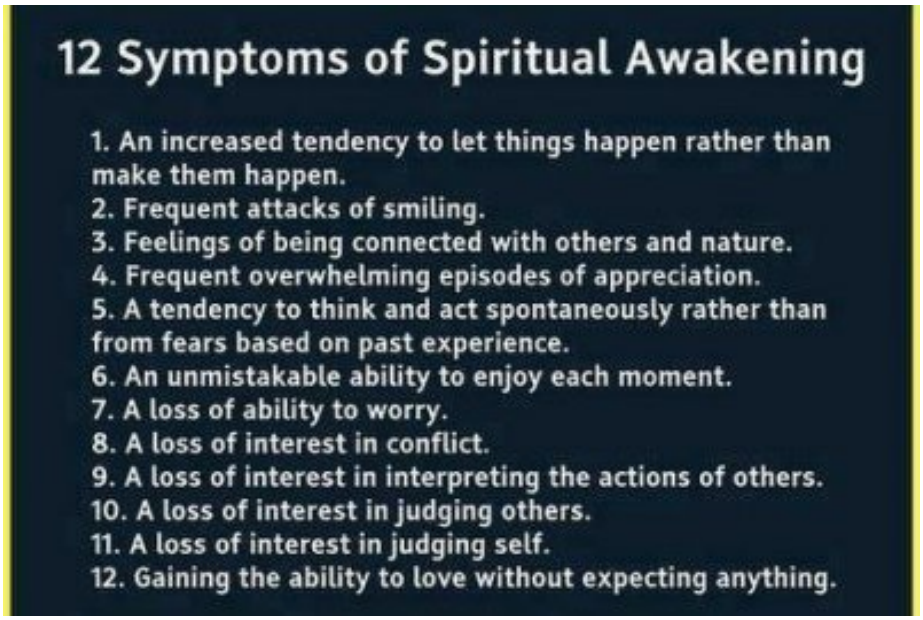
And it could be that by setting aside all that I-am-ing for a bit, sex might even turn out to be quite a potent portal, a doorway, into seeing through the illusion of self.

Enlightenment via orgasm.

Now that's hot.

CHASING THE UNICORN

September 27, 2016


12 Symptoms of Spiritual Awakening
1. An increased tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
2. Frequent attacks of smiling.
3. Feelings of being connected with others and nature.
4. Frequent overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
5. A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than from fears based on past experience.
6. An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
7. A loss of ability to worry.
8. A loss of interest in conflict.
9. A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
10. A loss of interest in judging others.
11. A loss of interest in judging self.
12. Gaining the ability to love without expecting anything.

Oh dear.

See that meme above?

Such an unfair unreasonable illogical crock of... carrot... it is.

Look at the goal it creates.

The Better-Me-If-Only goal.

Look at the dissatisfaction it creates with what you actually are and what you actually have and what you actually experience.

It's cruel, really.

This meme basically tells people who hurt and who feel inadequate and insufficient already (aka pretty much everyone), that there's a better way to live and a better way to be and they're not it and they don't have it.

Yeah that's kind.

And peaceful.

It's like dangling a picture of a unicorn and saying "Hey unicorns are out there! You're missing out by not having one. Other, better people have found one and you should take care of this lack in yourself by finding one too!"

Pssst… little secret...

There are no unicorns.

Can you see that, even just looked at logically, this mythology is nonsensical?

I mean really, other than its saying so, is there any direct evidence that the "symptoms" described in the meme are accurate?

Is this where you say, "Well I know someone who has achieved this! There's my guru! I myself live exactly this way; this is indeed how it is for me!"

Gosh I hope not.

Because let's just consider for a minute. Think about losing the ability to worry, for example.

Where would the "ability to worry" go, if it got lost? What dark alley?

Or "frequent attacks of smiling" and the "unmistakable (hey it's unmistakable!) ability to enjoy each moment."

Um, what?

Are you aiming to smile through the death of a loved one, physical pain, a lost job, a disinterested spouse?

Sure let's aim for a kind of coma-like affect in all situations. That sounds like an admirable goal.

Surely that'll be better than… oh I dunno… feeling stuff.

I mean, is only blissed-out non-worried non-conflict acceptable as an experience in life?

What's wrong with sadness, anger, fear, humiliation?

We could as well say only white is an acceptable color and we should somehow "get beyond" red, purple and green. Because those are not enlightened colors.

So yeah yeah, ok, but this is all really no biggie though, right?

That meme and what it represents are just some words saying what a lot of people believe, or more likely hope is true.

Seems harmless enough.

Except that so many people are encouraged to chase enlightenment by trying to attain something they don't have.

Something that may very well be simply non-existent.

In which case, there's never going to be any 'finding' that way.

Which can only lead to increased disappointment and failure.

Which leads to more searching for enlightenment…

to get over the disappointment and failure.

And increased pain and failure is something many people can little afford in their lives.

So maybe it's time to try something different.

Maybe it makes more sense to notice the actual present, what's actually here, what's actually experienced.

As it is.

Actually.

And to include everything in that present…judgments, non-smiling, interpretations, worrying and all.

Maybe we might look to see if the present is so very terrible or so very in need of repair and correction.

Because while we're busily focused on finding that awakening and fixing what's judged to be broken here and now…

We may not be open to noticing what's truly already here and now…

because we're focused so intently on what isn't here.

And really, can we ever know what's already right in front of us, right here, right now, when we're scanning the horizon for the unicorn?

YOU'RE A FRAUD

October 4, 2016

I used to think there was a real me.

There was also a public-Judy who smiled when she didn't want to, said yes when she meant no, and pretended she was confident or unafraid or daring.

Yeah that wasn't it.

The fake me covered up the real and spend lots of time and money polishing the presentation.

Secrets, lies, money spent on therapy, retreats, lipstick for the pig...

She had to be packaged, managed and controlled, especially if others were going to buy into her.

Because Real Judy was not presentable.

So she was hidden away- angry, unhappy, weak, and trying hard to never be seen.

Although suddenly sometimes she would burst out of hiding and her restraints anyway- angry, sad, afraid, unkind and Not As She Should Be.

Yeah Real Me was not pretty.

She was a lot like the Incredible Hulk actually. She needed to be kept secret.

Was that hidden Judy the real authentic one?

For that matter which was the authentic David Banner, the nice guy or the raging Hulk?

Most people believe that there's a true self and a fraud self.

But which is which?

'Course, delving into which self is real is like trying to determine which is the true space- the stuff inside your home or the stuff out there by the moon.

I mean, it's all space; in fact it's all the *same* space.

And besides, there's nothing there- it's *space*.

But anyway... which is the so-called real Me? The hidden one seems like it's real doesn't it? The prettied-up smiley one feels false.

Because obviously no one would have to work so hard to package and pretty-up something real, right?

But do we *know* there is such a thing as a true or false self at all? What's the proof?

Usually people answer by saying things like, "When I'm not myself it doesn't feel good. When I'm inauthentic it feels bad in my body."

So what most of us call 'authentic' is a feeling we like better than another feeling that we don't like, one feeling that is more soothing than another.

By that logic though, the hidden Hulk self can't be the authentic one, because it feels awful and it comes with shame and guilt, which also feel bad.

So that can't be it.

Which leaves the covered up, pretend-nice lipsticked one as the authentic one.

Wait. What?

Perhaps it makes no sense to determine what's real by a feeling.

Instead maybe we could consider, just for a moment…

What if we are never what we seem to be?

What if we are always frauds?

What if no story... not nice Me, mean Me, smart Me, funny Me or weird Me… is what we are?

Perhaps we are all living a lie, all the time. Even when some feeling seems to verify realness.

We might just feel false and inauthentic because we are false and inauthentic.

Because as long as we think this body and these variable roles and circumstances are what we truly are, we are living a lie.

It could be it's just not possible to be human, posing as what we are not, and not be a fraud.

Because the Self is a character, a role.

And a character is not a real thing.

Which means the character can't do anything but pretend.

As long as we think there's a true Me, pretense is all we've got.

We'll never be a better or truer fake character.

That's not even what we want anyway- to be a better fake.

That's the opposite of authentic.

So maybe it can be seen that as humans, there is no choice.

We have to accept the pretense.

And once that is seen, we might not have to continue working so hard to maintain better-looking appearances, or to be a truer, more authentic, more real Me.

We might be able to relax into the fakery.

We might even be able to let go of some of the guilt for being being inauthentic when we can see there's no choice.

We might even enjoy the show of it.

Because yeah we're pretending to be somebody.

Yeah we're inauthentic.

And so what?

Where's the problem?

What real authentic thing even cares or needs it different?

THINK. RINSE. REPEAT.

October 11, 2016

My sweet little cat Teeny climbs onto my lap wanting some petting.

She bumps her head into my writing hand. She puts out her paw to bring my hand back when it has the nerve to move away.

She wants love. She wants attention.

She gets both.

Does the fact that Teeny gets petted mean something about her?

"This hand on the back of my head means I am a deserving, lovable, worthy kitty."

If I didn't respond to her head bumps and pet her, would that mean Teeny is unlovable?

Would she conclude, "Oh no! No one loves me! I am worthless!"

Nah, more likely she'd just get up and go find somewhere else to sit.

Maybe a window where the sun is coming in.

She doesn't have to earn either sun or love.

It's there or it isn't.

Getting or not getting isn't made to mean anything about her.

So there's no pain in not getting what she wants.

Because it's not about her.

It's just a happening.

Next.

Of course we humans like getting some loving now and then too.

The difference between us and cats is that we think getting it or not…

Means something.

About us.

Getting means, "I'm deserving, I'm worth something, I'm good."

Not getting means, "I'm bad, I'm not enough, I'm unlovable."

Ouch.

Humans make getting a little petting turn into painful proof of I AM.

We make everything turn into proof of I AM.

But could it be the pain is in the meaning?

Maybe all suffering can be pointed back to...

"This means I am (insert word here.)"

Because really, what real thing needs so much navel-gazing?

What is served by all that self-monitoring? What gives a darn how we're doing?

Meaning, seemingly about us…

Is simply painful.

Symbolism makes us nuts.

Right/wrong, should/shouldn't, bad/good.

Miserable stuff, this meaning.

And yet often right about now is when clients say, "Well then, what's the point? Why bother with anything; why be alive then?"

As if we need pain and a reason in order to take a breath or pump a heart.

Luckily we can look to Teeny the cat, or really any non-human, for an answer.

Teeny doesn't apply add-on concepts to a harmless situation.

If she doesn't get petted she moves to sit somewhere else, looks out the window, soaks in some sun.

No biggie.

Doesn't change what she is one bit.

Doesn't make her a lovable or unlovable cat based on whether some hand touches her neck.

Watching her, it's clear that the point of doing anything is just the doing of it.

And that the meaning of life is simply to be alive.

Just because.

Life happening.

Is that not enough for us crazy humans?

Maybe that's miracle enough.

Maybe we don't need to deserve love, be worthy, be enough.

Maybe we don't need to accomplish, be good, strive, fit in, qualify, or measure up.

Maybe just being a human in the sun is enough.

Teeny says "Yes that's right.

And please pet me."

WHAT'S THE POINT?

October 25, 2016

I often wish I had a dollar for every time I hear it from a client. I'd be writing the Mind-Tickler from my yacht right now.

"What's the point? I need a purpose. Why get out of bed?"

Seems many many folks are dedicated to the idea that humans need a point in order to have a worthwhile life.

Even though if we actually consider, we can see that that idea is incorrect and actually makes life miserable and feel less worthwhile.

I mean, think about it. What other creature needs a purpose? Do mosquitoes need a purpose? Cats, toads, scorpions, raccoons?

Nah.

While it's enough for every other creature to simply exist, for humans, it's, "No no no, I need more than mere existence. I need a POINT."

Only humans think we're so important that we require more than just being alive.

Although really… what for?

Seriously.

It's not like purpose brings us peace.

On the contrary.

Rather than the beautiful meaningful life that thought insists will come because we have a purpose, in actuality we get stress, striving, dissatisfaction, failure and inadequacy.

Mmmm, gimme some more of that.

Have you noticed the misery in reaching for meaning, the striving and un-peace of having to have a point or purpose?

"Get up, get going! Do something! You have a purpose, something to make happen! Stop sitting on your lazy ass and get moving!"

Sure. Peaceful.

But maybe that vague sense of lacking something, missing something, is the point of needing a point.

Can you see how need-for-purpose keeps the focus single-mindedly on self, problem solving, goal attaining, here-is-not-enough-ness?

Dissatisfied. Lacking. Forever.

That doesn't seem right, does it?

Maybe we've had this wrong.

Even though it seems to be, even though it feels like it should be… maybe existence is not really about anything at all.

Because you can see that life is not important, right?

All shapes, sizes, webbings, claws, fingernails, number of toes. Ebbing and flowing. Coming and going.

No biggie. Not important.

So can you feel how simple life could be, how pure, how lovely a collection of varied and color-filled experiences, if it could be lived without… requirement?

Y'know, just for the livingness of it?

It could be that, free of point-obligation, we might be able to just… exist... for a while.

Free. Living.

Just because we ARE.

Wouldn't that be something?

All of us on this earth- every living creature- experiencing.

Just cuz.

As if the point to living is just the living of it.

As in, there is no point.

Just alive. For now.

There's a point for ya.

Living. Experiencing. Anything. Everything.

Joy, love, misery, shame, suffering, boredom, ecstasy.

And then…

Next.

No purpose, no point, no lesson, no growth, no meaning.

Because those are simply concepts. And concepts are a whole bunch of nothing.

So why get out of bed in the morning?

Because we do.

Because why not.

Because life happens.

Silly humans.

"The meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves."

~Alan Watts

YOU'RE NOT SAFE

November 22, 2016

You're not safe.

Aha!

You knew it, right?

This "unsafe" thing is what sends people running to retreats and therapy and doctors and booze and meditation and political rallies and onesies with feet.

Though even with all that, you never have been safe.

No matter how many brownies were eaten or how many friends lined up for a comfort hug.

No matter how long that job, that health, that spouse has been there.

You vote, rally, canvas and protest, and yet don't control the election outcome.

You dedicate yourself to years of diets, vitamins and exercise and still get ailments, or wrench a knee, or get hit by a bus.

You turn yourself inside out to be what some partner or boss wants, and still they're dissatisfied and ditch you anyway.

You concoct all kinds of ways of convincing yourself you are or can be safe, and that you and all those carefully chosen actions are what made that happen.

And yet, that sense of something not right, something bad happening or going to happen…

It's right there…

Just waiting for the brownie pan to be empty.

Man don't you hate that?

You want safety. You want promises. You want assurances, dammit.

Which, if they come at all, never seem to be adequate anyway.

And yet somehow, despite all that, here you are.

Have you noticed, through all the attempts and strategies to be safe, and all the feelings that insist you're not…

Here you are, safe?

Funny how that gets missed.

When I was in high school my mom had a friend whose husband went out to the car to get something, while his wife went out to their backyard. When the husband came back to the yard the wife was dead. She had taken a bite of apple from their backyard tree and choked on it.

That should have been a safe scenario, right? Woman in her own backyard?

'Course, she actually was safe. She was outta here.

And her husband was OK, though he didn't look it by most standards. He felt some very intense stuff for a while, went through a storm, and went on to live his life.

So somehow we are simultaneously not safe - things can change at any moment...

And at the same time, regardless of how it seems or feels, we are also...

Safe.

Until we're not.

And even then, we are.

Got that?

From the moment we're born, we walk through life inherently insecure.

We never know what's going to happen next.

We like to think we do, and we try, try, try to make a place where any uncertainty doesn't have to be acknowledged.

But those strategies don't work. We feel the falseness in them.

Which is why so often that underlying sense of anxiety and uncertainty continues to hum away in the background.

Because we want to DO SOMETHING. But we don't know what. Or how.

At some level, we know we are powerless in this regard.

This contradiction- being always-unsafe while also being always-safe - can drive the mind a little nuts.

It hates complexity, contradiction and non-black-and-white.

But like it or not, the fact remains that we're still always both- safe and unsafe.

So perhaps instead of trying so hard to eradicate insecurity, we might shift focus and notice the security already here.

Because there's a lot of it.

Besides, maybe we don't need to protect against it all anyway.

Maybe we can sink into uncertainty.

See if it's so gosh-darn terrible.

If only because noticing safety that's already here, even though there's constant uncertainty, can be a calming experience.

Which, as it happens is what we're looking for, right?

And really, in the end, what is there to protect?

A Body? Bodies are already protected by existence.

They're protected until existence says it's time to not be.

We can't outmaneuver existence. When it's time to go, it's time.

Nothing we do can protect against that.

Are we protecting an image?

Nah, images don't need protection.

So maybe there's nothing to protect. Maybe there's nothing to do. Maybe it's not up to us.

Maybe we can relax into the reality of insecurity, uncertainty and not knowing. And just experience the beauty of complexity.

May as well.

Because we've been living this paradoxical safe/unsafe thing all our lives.

We're used to it.

We're safely unsafe.

We're unsafely safe.

Whew.

Finally a certainty we can count on.

STORY TIME

December 13, 2016

Hi boys and girls! Today I'm going to tell a little story.

A sort-of parable.

As you read there may be a lot that makes no sense or that feels wrong. Or maybe it will open some mind-doors for you.

Either way, it's just fiction. Not meant to be accurate, not meant to be Truth, not meant to be The Answer.

So hopefully you'll be able to gather up your popcorn and enjoy the fantasy.

Imagine that you are consciousness, floating above this planet.

You have no body, no hands, no feet, no ears. You're just, well…

Nothing.

And imagine that you want experience; you want something to be conscious *of* .

Because consciousness isn't anything if it isn't conscious *of* something.

But there's no way to experience anything, to register anything, if there isn't a place for experience to land.

Being conscious, experiencing, requires hardware. It requires receptors, like eyes or tentacles, for example.

In order to hear, to feel, to see, receptors are necessary.

So imagine that you/consciousness break up into billions of little pieces and drop down into hardware.

You drop into bodies. You join with various life forms.

(Ok Ok. If mind-revolt is kicking in, remember it's just a story.)

Now in a body, you can hear, touch, feel, cry, smell.

You can be what you are.

Conscious.

An infinite amount of experience is now available.

And it's happening!

Wow! Now there's red and black and loud and soft and rain and sun and sweet and sour and Mother Theresa and Hitler and Trump and Bernie and tears and bliss and love and hate and pain and orgasm and...

Wow!

Can you see that you might want it *all*?

Without preference, without one experience being better or worse than another?

We might imagine consciousness saying 'Yes!' to everything.

Because there is an infinite amount of evidence that it doesn't only want the happy blissed-out stuff.

And now turning attention to the bit of consciousness that has dropped down into hardware…

We might notice that in that bit, in that body, there might be a very strong longing to reconnect with the whole, with what it really is.

There might be a sense of incompleteness, of not-enough-ness.

There might be a sense of something off, of wrongness, of "There's something wrong with me."

Because when it thinks it's a bit, it has to feel incomplete. Deficient. Lacking. Wanting.

Because, if it's a bit, it *is* incomplete.

And perhaps we might also notice how much the bit invests in bit-ness.

How it goes all out trying to be better and to improve itself ("I need to get better, do better, feel better, think better!")

And how urgently it pretends to be separate, unique (even though that hurts).

Watch as it tries to fit in and belong, to follow rules, get approval, meet standards, be well-thought-of, appear "normal."

Watch how desperately it hides that sense of itself as not enough.

Even from itself.

Not realizing that all those others -the ones it's comparing itself to- are also feeling not-enough and pretending, hiding and trying to improve.

The nerds and the bullies, the angry exes, the rich neighbors, the tribal leaders and teachers…

All similarly striving to hide their incompleteness.

All pretending and hoping not to be discovered as inadequate bits of consciousness.

And yet…

Meanwhile…

Is it even possible to break up consciousness into bits?

How does one separate nothing? What would do this separating?

And how could conscious go somewhere (say… into bodies) that it wasn't already? How would that work, exactly?

Turns out that despite humans' strong sense of disconnection from the whole, consciousness can't be cut up into pieces.

So we are already connected to each other and to the whole.

Because we ARE the whole.

We are already complete.

We are already enough.

Even though we don't think so, we are one whole experience.

Perceived to be individualized.

But not actually individualized.

We're the experience of being both a separate person and also the whole of consciousness.

Simultaneously.

We're both.

We don't need to pick one.

One isn't better than the other.

We're all of it, all the time.

Whether the individual realizes it or not.

We are... that... whole.

That complete.

And with that completeness, our story ends…

And we all live...

Ever after.

No matter what experience happens.

The End.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

January 7, 2017

My sweet little cat Teeny climbs onto my lap wanting some petting.

She bumps her head into my writing hand. She puts out her paw to bring my hand back when it has the nerve to move away.

She wants love. She wants attention.

She gets both.

Does the fact that Teeny gets petted mean something about her?

"This hand on the back of my head means I am a deserving, lovable, worthy kitty."

If I didn't respond to her head bumps and pet her, would that mean Teeny is unlovable?

Would she conclude, "Oh no! No one loves me! I am worthless!"

Nah, more likely she'd just get up and go find somewhere else to sit.

Maybe a window where the sun is coming in.

She doesn't have to earn either sun or love.

It's there or it isn't.

Getting or not getting isn't made to mean anything about her.

So there's no pain in not getting what she wants.

Because it's not about her.

It's just a happening.

Next.

Of course we humans like getting some loving now and then too.

The difference between us and cats is that we think getting it or not…

Means something.

About us.

Getting means, "I'm deserving, I'm worth something, I'm good."

Not getting means,"I'm bad, I'm not enough, I'm unlovable. "

Ouch.

Humans make getting a little petting turn into painful proof of I AM.

We make everything turn into proof of I AM.

But could it be the pain is in the meaning?

Maybe all suffering can be pointed back to...

"This means I am (insert word here.)"

Because really, what real thing needs so much navel-gazing?

What is served by all that self-monitoring? What gives a darn how we're doing?

Meaning, seemingly about us…

Is simply painful.

Symbolism makes us nuts.

Right/wrong, should/shouldn't, bad/good.

Miserable stuff, this meaning.

And yet often right about now is when clients say, "Well then, what's the point? Why bother with anything; why be alive then?"

As if we need pain and a reason in order to take a breath or pump a heart.

Luckily we can look to Teeny the cat, or really any non-human, for an answer.

Teeny doesn't apply add-on concepts to a harmless situation.

If she doesn't get petted she moves to sit somewhere else, looks out the window, soaks in some sun.

No biggie.

Doesn't change what she is one bit.

Doesn't make her a lovable or unlovable cat based on whether some hand touches her neck.

Watching her, it's clear that the point of doing anything is just the doing of it.

And that the meaning of life is simply to be alive.

Just because.

Life happening.

Is that not enough for us crazy humans?

Maybe that's miracle enough.

Maybe we don't need to deserve love, be worthy, be enough.

Maybe we don't need to accomplish, be good, strive, fit in, qualify, or measure up.

Maybe just being a human in the sun is enough.

Teeny says "Yes that's right.

And please pet me."

BAD PERSON

January 24, 2017

I used to think I was a bad person.

Like, Incredible Hulk bad.

It seemed like it was true.

I tried to prove it by pointing to a direct, take-no-prisoners style and inability to suffer fools...

(Something those of you who work with me might know has not gone anywhere)

...as well as commentary by others saying what they thought of me.

It seemed like people could get hurt by me.

It seemed they needed to be protected from me lest they get hurt.

I felt like I needed to keep quiet, hidden, locked away.

To protect others.

Although, while focusing on what kind of person I seemed like, there was much I didn't notice.

Because when we focus on what things feel or seem like, we miss stuff.

Stuff that may not support the reality those words create.

Stuff like…

Does a bad person care about hurting others, and so much that she'd lock herself away just to protect them?

I failed to notice that what it felt like I was and what I actually was, were not the same thing.

"It feels like"… "it seems like"…These expressions keep most of us from seeing straight.

Because they're describers of something, not the actual something.

They're a repeatedly-present example of how language creates illusion and obscures truth.

By using these harmless-seeming words everywhere (watch and see), we don't notice thought creating a problem where there isn't one.

"Are you unsafe?" "It feels like it, yes."

Is that the same as, Yes?

Is feeling unsafe the same as being unsafe?

Not even close.

Of course, this may seem like an exercise in, "Really Judy, who cares?"

It would seem to be not much of a big deal.

But humans are bat-crap crazy.

And what do humans have that no other species has?

Language. Aka symbols. Aka meaning.

No other species draws pictures on cave walls.

Words are symbols. They describe. They create meaning.

(Or seem to, anyway.)

They're not a thing in themselves and not the thing being described.

Words, language, symbols have created our sense of reality.

But a sense of reality is not reality itself.

That's just more seems like.

Seems like reality.

Living in a symbolic, pretend-it's-real, seems-like world has made us nuts.

So it never occurs to most of us that maybe it doesn't matter what it feels like.

It never occurs to most of us that constantly describing what things feel or seem like, obscures what is.

And what is what is? What real thing are we left with without words?

Well, completely take away language and we find…

Experience with no describers.

Which as it turns out…

Is whole lotta nothing.

You can test this for yourself.

For just a moment, try to experience without describing what you're experiencing or whether it feels like a good thing or whether you like it or what it means.

Try to experience yourself without any words at all.

Maybe you'll notice how diffuse and decentralized experience instantly becomes.

No words = no thoughts = no reality.

So ok Judy, well, no thanks. Right?

Yeah, we prefer descriptions, thank you very much.

We prefer the fakery of seems like to nothingness.

Which is fine.

But when we're hurting or scared, as so many are these days, it could just be…

that things aren't actually as dark or as painful as they seem.

Because words keep suffering in place.

That seems like something that might be worth experiencing.

Wouldn't it seem so?

SEEKING LOVE

February 7, 2017

Love.

We've been looking for it since forever.

Since infancy we've been searching for love from parents, partners, siblings, friends, children, bosses, strangers in the street.

Seeking. Out there. From them. Towards us.

It's the absolute unquestioned "Of course!" religion for many of us.

"C'mon Judy, we gotta have love!"

Musssst haavvvve loovvve.

As if we're zombies prowling for brains or something. Constantly on the hunt.

Sometimes we even think we catch some once in a while.

Yay!

Then it leaves. Or goes to someone else instead. Or changes. Or gets uninteresting. Or it wasn't the right kind of love. Or there wasn't enough of it.

Boo.

So here comes one of those questions we're not supposed to ask, and that causes some of you to get mad at me when I do anyway.

Do we really need others' love?

Other than that it feels good, what for?

What makes chasing love so gosh-darned important that it runs our lives?

I know we want it, I know we like it, I know it feels like we need their love.

But…

Think about it; if you can, just for a moment set aside all the brain washing and mass hypnosis going on.

Is scoring other people's love necessary for life?

Nah.

If it was necessary, there wouldn't be vast numbers of people- alive people, existing people- who don't have others' love.

They don't have love; just ask them, they'll tell you!

And yet, life goes on.

So yes we certainly enjoy love. It's wonderful; I understand.

Life certainly feels more fun with it, not as fun or even downright bad without it.

But having others' love is not a requirement.

Thought says we need it.

But no.

Besides, have you noticed how it becomes all about Me when we don't get others to demonstrate love towards us?

"See? I'm unlovable!"

When it appears others don't love us, we think it means something...

About us.

Invariably we conclude, "This means I'm unlovable /deficient /a loser."

Which is one reason why the need to be loved by others, hurts.

Because it seems to indicate that we are not sufficient as we are.

Without others pouring their love into our empty vessel so that we can fill up to the enough-mark...

We're lacking. We're missing something.

But this meaning-applying is just a trick of mind.

Try taking thought off its usual, "Woe is lonely unloved me, I need love from him- her- them" track, and see if, without someone else feeling the right things about us, we are enough right in this moment, anyway.

Aren't we?

'Course we are.

"Lack/not enough" turns out to be just a cute little lie the mind tells.

We're actually just fine as is.

However much love we do or don't score.

So maybe we don't need to suck up other people's love like some brain-eater or desperately hungry vampire.

Because while we're trying so hard to get people to love us, turns out there are other things we don't notice, too.

Such as, if we have to try so hard to get love, can we trust what we get when we appear to succeed?

Yeah, not likely.

And, does the love felt in another person's body have anything to do with our own body?

That's their love.

How does what they feel in their chest (or whatever body part) have anything to do with us?

Except again for the meaning we assign.

So, what if it was somehow magically possible to stop searching day and night for more or better love, and just make do with what's here?

Focusing on the love we have rather than what we can get.

It could be that when we focus on the feelings in our own chest, we begin to notice how much love, of our own, we already have.

Love that we get to feel.

Towards others.

Instead of saying "Gimme gimme" to their feelings, we get our own feelings-in-the-chest.

Regardless of what they feel.

All ours.

No one can take that from us.

In fact, it could be that what is in us might more than make up for what is or isn't in others' chests.

Which means we wouldn't have to try so hard to make people love us.

Wouldn't that be something.

That is why I hope you can enjoy the feeling in your own chest this Valentine's week.

Because it could just be that you've got more than enough love already.

And maybe your own love makes you (gasp) more than enough, too.

Oh I love that for you.

DO NOT HAVE FUN WITH THIS

February 21, 2017

It's all so stinkin' serious…this enlightenment business.

Isn't it?

It's important, earnest, deep, necessary.

It matters.

This spiritual awakening stuff is vewy vewy serious.

In fact, the notion of enlightenment inspires arguments and lectures and finger-waggings and lots of know-it-all arrogance.

Some insist it takes discipline, study, meditation, satsangs, retreats, maybe even orange uniforms and shaved heads.

Y'know, kinda like the military-

Organized groups doing only the right things, trying hard to think only the right thoughts.

Yes, very free, that.

Or maybe we believe that it takes a lightening strike for no reason, while we're sitting on a park bench or hanging in a cave or sleeping with the roaches.

But no matter what the favorite teacher or flavor of the moment or branded point of view…

The search for enlightenment inspires vast numbers of people to wonder...

What's wrong with them.

I mean, even lightening doesn't find them attractive enough to strike them down, and they never get that blissed-out-never-leaves-for-ever-and-ever state of mind.

There may be disagreement over particulars, but this much is clear.

There's a right way.

There's a right way to live, a right way to think, a right way to feel...

A right thing to get. A right way to get it.

And all those people chasing enlightenment? They're not doin' it right.

But….

Doesn't that sound like business as usual?

Doesn't it seem odd that that life inside the chase-enlightenment box is just as is disappointing, punishing, lacking and inadequate as the everyday life outside the chase-enlightenment box?

Where's the lighten-ment?

Where's the en-light-ening?

Seriously, what's the good of enlightenment if it doesn't… lighten?

Maybe in all the focus on what is missing and what needs to be done, we've failed to notice something.

Something right here.

Maybe we haven't noticed…. what we're focusing on.

Almost all the time, our focus is on what isn't right and what we haven't got.

So instead, maybe we could focus for a while… on focusing itself.

Because then we might just discover that experience is simply thought.

And that what we focus on, where we put attention, actually creates experience.

Which means it might make sense to attend to something other than what's not here, what needs improving, what's not enough.

Because that different focus alone just might change our entire experience in the world.

I mean, no thought is more true, or more real, or matters more than any other.

One thought is as good as any other.

They're all a bunch of nothing.

No matter what they're "about."

And since clearly, focus on what's lacking and inadequacy and future punishing consequences for that lack, hurts like hell…

Really then, why *not* focus on different thoughts?

Why not notice what *is* here, what *is* happening now, the good here now, the safety here now, the fun here now, the peace here now.

Already.

Instead of focusing on what isn't.

Why not?

It could just be that we might have (gasp) fun.

We might find that life is really lighter, safer, more sufficient and far more complete than thought has permitted us to even consider.

As is.

As in…

Maybe enlightenment is here.

Already.

Ah, if only we could notice.

Wouldn't that be fun?

THUFFERIN THUCCOTASH!

February 28, 2017

"If a mirror ever makes you sad, you should know that it doesn't know you."

~Kabir

Want to play a little game? Let's have some fun.

Think about that You or Part of You that's imperfect, not good, not enough.

Maybe it's unlovable or a loser or unkind or irresponsible.

However you might characterize your less-than-ideal self, just pick one for now.

Now close your eyes, and take a look.

In your minds eye, summon it up and actually look at it.

What does Bad You look like?

OMG, you can actually see it.

Turns out everyone has some visual of this Bad-Me thing, though sometimes it takes a little practice to notice.

For many folks, it's a cartoon- The Incredible Hulk, Lucy from Peanuts, the Tasmanian Devil.

Or it might be just a body part- a snarling mouth, clenched fists, tears on a cheek.

Or perhaps it's an old photograph or movie, seemingly of a real person, such as a parent or spouse.

Whatever it is, notice it's an image.

Certainly not an actual thing, not a real person.

It's not even an actual photo.

It's a mental representation. A stand-in. A characterization.

Of the You that's bad. Of the You that's not enlightened and missing out. Of the You that's unmotivated, selfish, unloved, a failure.

You can even put your hand through it and wriggle your fingers on the other side.

That's how flimsy it is.

That's not You.

That's a wispy bit of mental pixel.

That thing can't hurt anyone, or be alone, or make mistakes.

That thing can't do anything.

See, because, it's not real. It's just lines, shapes and colors, happening in the mind.

Wherever and whatever the hell that is.

And yet that picture is a good part of what is summoned up as proof of your bad, not-good-enough self.

As if a mental cartoon can make itself real, or prove anything, simply by repetition and insistence.

And then based on said picture, a narrating thought intones, "See? You're bad, obnoxious, damaged."

The moving picture has a sound track. The cartoon comes with a thought-bubble commentary.

Which naturally you believe.

Because that's easy to do, when you don't notice that what's speaking is a wispy no-thing...

Commenting about another no-thing.

And the narrator certainly sounds like it knows what it's talking about.

Even though there's no proof of that either, except for additional mental movies.

Now I'm not saying don't listen to the thoughts or the sound track.

Though I don't know why you'd want to; that's never a happy-making experience.

And I'm not saying try to make the picture go away, though that can be interesting to play with.

I'm just saying maybe you might observe the process.

Beginning with how much dissatisfaction and unhappiness with yourself starts with these images of Not-Enough-You.

Because there is no requirement to let some mental cartoon dictate one's contentment with life.

And then?

Well, maybe you'll have some fun finding out.

Because really, who doesn't like cartoons or the movies? Once you see how much nothing all that sound and imagery is...

It can be darned entertaining when the Powerpuff Girls or Daffy Duck or some not-real-picture of your mother isn't running your life.

How enjoyable might it be to not let some imagined picture of self...

Some description...

Some impersonation...

Define what you are or aren't.

Because Pow! Bam! Thufferin' Thuccotash!

After a while,

That can start to seem almost…

Comic-al.

"Reality is only a Rorschach ink blot."

~Alan Watts

A LITTLE TALE OF BLAH BLAH BLAH

March 21, 2017

Once upon a time we were tiny babies.

And we were smiling little things.

Happy little experiencers.

Kinda like puppies.

Diaper full? cry. Belly full? smile. Fingers wiggling? coo.

No evaluation. No analysis. No judgment.

Just life-ing.

And then language got ahold of us.

And it stole happy right out from under us.

Because by age 2, we were a name, we were a good girl or boy, we were nice or sweet or smart or selfish or lazy.

And that was a shoe, this was a ball, that was a sister.

Things were identified.

We were identified.

By words.

And of course we didn't notice, because who does really,

That we had begun removing ourselves from existence,

In order to label and evaluate it.

Because words are symbols for things, not things themselves.

So they essentially separate us from experience.

Language describes existence, instead of simply the living of it.

And so, with a full vocabulary in our pockets, we were talking about things, thinking about things,

Deciding if this was good or bad, right or wrong.

As if we were a step removed from presence, from the simple experience of living,

And we, instead…

Observed, monitored and judged,

Identified and labeled life...

Via language.

And with that full bag of words at our disposal, came…

Thoughts.

Oh boy!

Fun, huh?

Well OK yeah, maybe that's not quite the word we'd use for thinking.

Though without words, thoughts are not possible.

Which is why it's perhaps not coincidental that some people have described awakening as a "wordless" experience.

Perhaps language and the meaning it comes with, and its symbolism and self-consciousness, is what has made mankind…

Batsh*t crazy.

Now I'm not saying things would be better without words,

Because words are the building blocks of what we in this dream world call a "functioning person."

I'm just asking what might we be left with, and what would life be like, if we were incapable of language?

Maybe just an experience of sitting somewhere, like in the sun maybe.

Though not even that, when there's no word for sitting or sun or experience.

Perhaps we can start to sense how..

Diffuse...

Decentralized…

Things might become...

Without describers of any kind.

How there'd suddenly be no Me, no ego, no person.

I mean, there can't be self-watching and navel-gazing without language.

No words, no self.

No sun, no body, no preferences, no shoelaces either.

No anything.

Just…

Blank...

Amorphous...

Mind-less...

Experience.

Huh.

People pay a whole lot of money to spiritual teachers and retreats trying to get that experience of words going silent.

And when we consider how often we label our experiences as problems or painful, well…

Wordless starts looking pretty good.

Though again, I'm not saying we should drop language.

Because first of all, that's not even possible.

And second, even if it somehow was possible, we'd still need to know our names and sign checks and read important things like the Mind Tickler and all.

I'm just saying, perhaps we can at least notice where all trouble, sense of self, pain, unhappiness and lack of presence (more words) comes from.

Because once we do start to catch on,

And once we do start having some fun watching how language forms every single bit of our reality,

Things kind of go…

Quiet.

Still.

Simple.

Poof.

Ah.

- - - -

- - - -

Sorry, did you say something?

SEE YA LATER, EGO

March 28, 2017

This being a person thing …

It's kind of a pain in the ass.

I mean, sure Judy's cute and all. :)

But she's also prone to inconvenient thoughts and feelings, bodily functions that have a mind of their own, graying hair and wrinkles, and frequent desires for French fries.

You may notice your own list of Wish-it-was-differents.

Perhaps you're reactive, poor, selfish, alone. Or lazy, irresponsible, addicted, weak.

The personality has likes, dislikes and inconvenient desires.

Which, as every card-carrying spiritual seeker knows, is…

Not How It Should Be.

Yeah, these human thingys are…

Flawed.

And that, of course, is…

Just wrong.

But….

How to do existence without ego?

How does one get so enlightened that one "dies", loses the personality, blisses out forever…

And disappears?

Yeah.

Interesting concept, that.

One that drives so many mythed-out seekers into overheated overdrive of failure and They-have-something-I-don't-have- itis.

But still… a concept.

Perhaps even a delusion.

Because nobody can kill a personality.

And though yes I realize I'm opening the door here to the Correcters Of All That's Right and Holy…

(Oh hey come on in, friends.)

Still, we can't kill what isn't alive to begin with.

Maybe looking for ourselves, we can see the myth in this idea that we can get so enlightened that we lose the person.

Because what would be left without it?

No one turns into a puff of smoke and disappears.

"I don't know what happened, Officer. She was right here a minute ago. And then she cried, "Aha!" and …vanished!"

Besides, ego, personality, person….

Those are concepts too.

And those also are not alive, also not things.

So they may indeed appear to come, go or disappear.

But they're still a bunch nothing.

And how can nothing die?

Plus, that personality…

Where's it gonna go?

Rome? Mars? Next door to the sucker who doesn't know about enlightenment?

Nah.

It'll still be here to tie our shoes, pet the dog and drive on the correct side of the road.

Why shouldn't it be?

Even though simultaneously…

as in – at the same time-

We may indeed come to see that we're not that personality, that it's an act, a shell game, a pretend.

A trick of mind.

And along with that seeing may come some quite nice feelings.

Feelings we like.

Which are experienced by …

Oh.

The personality.

I mean, how exactly could consciousness be conscious, what would it be conscious of…

Without ego, personality, person?

Yeah.

We can't kill off the person.

It's needed.

Even though it might be hard work and downright painful…

Maintaining these characters...

Still, they're not going anywhere.

We have to learn to work with them…

As they are.

Without trying to beat them into well-behaved acceptable boxes.

Because yes, even spiritual boxes are still boxes.

So mind-ego-personality may have its flaws and preferences.

And it may have its fix-Me-upper projects.

But where would we be without them?

Nowhere, man.

Namaste.

NOTHING SPECIAL

May 2, 2017

People often write to tell me they're hurting. Quite a few, actually.

They're overwhelmed by depression, failure, anger. They're despairing of ever being different, and often suicidal. They feel stuck and hopeless.

Some have had awakening experiences, which you might think would mean they'd be peaced out and happy. But no. Interestingly, often, many feel worse. Because for them, everything is not only painful, it's also meaningless.

No matter what the specifics of these personal stories, all are convinced they're particularly messed up, screwed up and hopeless.

Ouch.

And then I go and tell them what they're experiencing is… common.

Not because I'm unsympathetic.

But because when you hear from as many folks as I do, you begin to see the repetitive pattern of mind at work.

Comments become… predictable.

Almost like I'm psychic or something.

Which of course I'm not. I've just heard all this before. Many times.

Because it turns out…

Suffering has a script.

A repeated word-for-word, all-over-the-world-people-say-the-same-things, script.

The specific external circumstances are not at all the same of course.

But the conclusions and self referencing… oh yes.

Predictable down to the word.

All these very unique sufferers are saying...

All the same very not-unique things.

It becomes obvious how unoriginal the mind is.

All while insisting how original and unique we are.

You'd think people who feel painfully isolated might be thrilled to learn that they're not alone, and not unique.

But actually no. They are not pleased.

They argue for their special messed-upness.

They are disbelieving. Skeptical.

Almost annoyed.

"No way!" they all say. "My case is different. Other people don't suffer like this. Other people aren't this messed up. It's me. I'm different."

Of the 7 billion people on this rock, they know that they are especially pained, especially hopeless, especially broken.

An especially alone-in-the-world loser.

Ok honey, sure.

What's up with that insistence on individuality and special-ness?

Oh we humans do love this uniqueness thing, don't we?

We love the idea of poor-me-the-special-failure-in-the-universe.

We love the constant refrain of "I'm me, I'm a person, I'm unique, I'm real, I'm bad, I am I am I am."

We love the, "I am not like the others over there, I'm this loser over here," song.

And we sing it all the time.

Oh yes it hurts like a sum'bitch.

Painful stuff, being a person.

But judging by how hard folks insist that they are a special problem,

It is clear that pain, miserable as it is...

Is preferred to the possibility that we're not the least bit special, not unique, and…

Not even individual at all.

Yeah, no thanks. Shut the hell up about person-hood,

And pass the tissues and the anti-depressants.

But….

If we can think for a moment about our own painful situations in life-

not enough success or love or enlightenment or friends or health or whatever-

If it was possible to look at these life situations without thinking this means something about us… or has anything to do with us,

Notice what happens to the pain?

It hurts less.

Often a lot less.

Huh.

Same exact situations.

Without the meaning about one's self- the self-referencing, the self-monitoring, the self-recrimination, it's…

Easier.

So it's not the situations that are causing all this pain.

It's the individuality.

The self-ness. The unique person-ness of it.

That's what hurts.

Because is any one a distinct individual?

A unique, separate person?

It certainly looks like that's the case, of course.

And many of us do go with what it looks like and answer "Yes!"

But is that accurate?

Because a wave on the ocean looks like it is a distinct thing too, but is it indeed actually separate from the ocean?

No.

Think people are different from waves?

What if all the pain of everyday life, all the suffering, all the despair that everyone experiences...

Is entirely about the insistence that we are a Me, a person, a unique individual?

When what we really are, actually, is part of a crowd?

Ordinary.

Indistinguishable from others.

So blended in and the same and alike that we're literally…

The same stuff.

Could it be that we're all…no more than a wave?

A perceived-to-be-separate-but-not-actually-separate-from-the-sea-of-humanity wave?

We might watch what happens to suffering if that's the case.

And what happens to "I'm all alone in the world" isolation, if we're just a small part of something… bigger.

Then we're not alone.

We're huge.

Connected.

Vast.

Unlimited.

Never-ending.

Failure becomes a meaningless concept.

Because how can vastness be a failure?

Only an individual can be a failure.

We might notice how that possibility feels.

We might see that when we peel away all the ideas of separateness, all the ideas that a Me is what does things and messes up and blows it…

Then fault falls away too. As does blame. And shame. And regret.

All that pain that comes with the delusion of the person, falls away.

It's….

Calmer.

So yes, individuals hurt.

But thankfully an individual is not what we are.

No matter how much it appears so.

And though we may never come to know our own connectedness, our own ocean-ness,

Still... known or not... there it is.

Not apart, not separate, not bordered, not contained.

So the next time feelings of despair overtake us,

Maybe we can ride out that wave.

Knowing it isn't…

Person-al.

REACTING TOO MUCH

May 30, 2017

Reactions.

They happen.

As you know. And maybe wish was otherwise.

Like it or not though, all people react.

Animals do too.

What an odd human notion that that shouldn't happen.

As if we're supposed to stay calm at all times. Here is this amazing cornucopia of experiences available to us, and we only want the smiley ones.

So many in the spiritual community think reactions shouldn't happen and that they indicate a lack of evolution.

But that's not a particularly spiritual or evolved point of view, is it? Disapproval of the uncontrollable is typical and business as usual for most people, spiritual or not.

And really, why shouldn't reactions happen?

Other than thoughts like, "I don't like this," or "It's uncomfortable" or "I can't handle it".

It's just a reaction. Not the plague.

And of course thought lies, anyway. Because we can handle it. Look at how many times we've thought, "I can't take it!" and then… we took it. Lived through it. Went on. Life went on.

Thinking takes a sensation, calls it "bad" and "too much," and amplifies it with commentary and discussion about whether it's liked or not, good or not.

But when a loud noise scares my cat, she doesn't debate if she likes it or if she'd be a better cat if she didn't get scared. She just reacts with fear, jumps, runs, and then…

It's over.

Next.

Anyway, pssst- little secret- it doesn't matter if we like it.

Because existence offers us this amazing roller coaster ride. And even though we spend the whole trip insisting it should flatten out…

Existence runs this ride, not we silly humans. So we're spared the worry of being bored to death.

Perhaps we could consider what it would be like if the evaluation about reaction, or the certainty that it means something about our awfulness and need of repair, were to magically be gone?

What if it was OK to hiss, get our fur up, and be done with it? Without having to inquire or meditate or medicate or satsang the reaction away?

Life might be simpler. Life might be kinder. Life might be calmer.

Which ironically is what we're after in the first place.

And even if thought then helpfully adds, "But there are consequences- like losing a job or hurting someone else" ...

We might first notice that others can handle their reactions too, just like we can.

And then we might also look back and see that, frequently, the consequences that seemed at the time to most certainly be bad things, turned out with hindsight to be good things, not bad.

So all that avoidance of consequences that runs our lives- well, maybe that's not necessary either.

Maybe reacting is just not a big deal.

Maybe none of it matters.

In which case… ahhh. That sure takes a whole lot of work off the table, doesn't it?

Then we might get to experience life in all its flavors. Without trying to limit, contain or flatten it.

Which interestingly, sounds like one way of describing ... presence.

Something so many spiritual seekers are striving for.

Wouldn't it be something if it was right here all along, right here on the vast and never-ending reaction-buffet, just waiting to be consumed and enjoyed with gusto.

Bon appetit.

THE WOW OF YOU

June 6, 2017

Seems we humans do like to focus on what we're experiencing, doesn't it?

"I feel scared! Oh I am sad. Look, he's leaving. Others are doing blah-blah and it feels terrible. This tastes great!"

We're laser-focused on that *what* . A feeling, a thought, some colors, shapes and sounds, a body moving here or there? Yeah we are all about it.

Though sometimes, very occasionally, we might turn attention from What is being experienced to focus instead on Who is experiencing.

Then we observe The Experience-er.

"Look, I notice what I'm feeling! I notice my thoughts. I can observe myself, experiencing."

That shift in vantage point feels better sometimes. Not always solidly, not necessarily for long. But still, generally… better.

Whether it's the What or the Who, what's common to either perspective is the Me at the center of it all.

"I am the experiencer, I am the one experiencing this, and I am the observer of it all."

Gosh it's familiar, isn't it, that notion of Me as center point? We've been the locus of everything, the driver of every experience, since way back.

It makes us feel solid, and very central to the entire sense of existence.

"This is happening to me, by me and about me."

That stance feels so very strong, it is almost never questioned. So we go with it as a given. We start from, "I'm right here, in the center of this experience. I'm the one it's happening to," and then stick with that point of view no matter what. Most of the time it hurts, but oh well. It's the devil we know.

But what if that certainty of the self as the center point of all experience has been…well, let's call it …. misleading?

As in… ahem… wrong.

We don't want to be wrong, do we? That would be bad.

So let's play and have some fun for a few minutes, and try on something new. Who knows, maybe we'll find some rightness here.

So. What if you are not the one the experience, the dream, is happening TO?

What if you are not the owner of the dream, and not the dreamer? As in, what if it isn't YOUR dream, and you're not the one dreaming it?

What if you're the dream itself?

That would mean that literally, all sights, sounds, thoughts and feelings are what you ARE.

As in, the thought arises, "I'm a fraud," and what might it feel like if you are those words, literally?

Or the thought comes, "Others have it better." And what if now you are those words?

If you're open to consider that you are even the arguments with this idea… the annoyance, impatience, or fear that might be showing up at what crazy Judy is offering here…

If you're open to just trying it on, for just a moment...

perhaps there's something different to be discovered.

Something that center-point Me is very much not used to.

Because when you consider the possibility that what you are IS all those thoughts starting with the word, "But", and IS the fear, resistance and impatience or annoyance…

that you are the experience rather than The One Experiencing it…

Well…

Do you notice how the center ... disappears?

Can you sense how un-solid you are, if you're all those moving parts at once?

Look what happens to fury, indignation, resistance, hurt and fear, when those experiences are what you ARE.

If you are every experience, every word, every feeling and sight, do you notice the fluidity, the temporary, the no-centrality to hold on to?

You might even see that there is nothing that needs to hold on to something.

Almost like there is no you.

Like you're a whole bunch of nothing. Decentralized. As are others, too.

Of course, we're just playing here.

And yes, I know this isn't easy to consider.

If only because for decades, we have practiced such devotion to the story of Me, such dedication to, "Shut up you non-dual fruitcake! I'm right here! This is what I am!"

And we have a lifetime of training being entirely centered in self, a lifetime of residing so carefully within that delineated box, that shifting to non-

center feels …

Wrong. And weird. Very weird.

Of course the mind fights it.

But I hope you'll play with this anyway.

Because the weird-ness that comes from shifting focus from experience-er to experience itself, just might be what allows freedom from all boxes… including the 'certainty of self' container…to happen.

Because even usually-locked doors are still capable of unlocking and opening. Which means there can always be the possibility… a possibility that has not happened with the usual approach… to see that ...

there is no box to get out of.

Not when you are the box. And the thoughts and feelings about the box. And the colors and shape of the box.

I mean...

Wouldn't if be something is it's all you?

Wouldn't it be something if it turned out that Weird…

is actually...

Wonderfully... wrongly... wildly...

Wow?

WHAT HURTING MEANS ABOUT YOU

June 20, 2017

Some of us are hurting. Maybe even a lot of us.

Some are not sleeping, or too heavy to get out of bed many mornings, or waking in the middle of the night in a panic. Some have trouble saying no to wine, food, sex or love. Some of us procrastinate. Some don't have money, hate our jobs, the spouse is cheating or abusive, the kids are struggling or ignoring us.

Gosh there's no lack of troublesome situations in this human existence, huh?

Seems there's an infinite number of ways to generate anything from mild annoyance to anguished despair.

No, things are NOT ok as they are, thank you very much, all you weird supposedly-blissed-out spiritual gurus. No.

And life continues to bring situations. It's not like that's ever going to stop. We're certainly never going to be able to change, fix or preempt every possible circumstance that might potentially bring pain.

So since that's impossible, something different might make sense.

So think of any situation that is a problem. And then ask…

What does this situation mean about Me?

And notice that there is an answer to that question.

It'll be some version of, "This situation means I AM… weak, a failure, unlovable, bad, lazy, not enough, not a good parent, damaged."

That's because some version of, "This means x-y-z about me." is actually the common denominator to every emotional pain, anger, unhappiness we experience in life.

In fact situations that don't carry any self-meaning or self-defining are somehow... not painful. When there's no reflection of the Me …

Those situations don't hurt.

Meaning about the Me is required in order for us to experience a problem in any given circumstance.

Isn't that amazing?

It's all about the Me. Always.

So it seems we each really are the center of the universe.

Through pain, we define ourselves into existence.

That's what suffering is for, and why problems seem to keep coming.

So that the story of Me-as-the-center-of-everything can continue.

This is good news, actually. Because it turns out we don't have to continue the hopeless task of changing or protecting against every circumstance in the universe.

Instead, we are in a better position to consider…What if this painful situation- as it is- means absolutely nothing about me? What if I'm not the center of things, what if it all doesn't "reflect back" some meaning about me or onto me?

What if those zeroes on my bank statement mean nothing about me? What if that expression on my kid's face means nothing about me? What if no sleep or this heaviness or that word means nothing about me?

What would that feel like?

It's just possible that the very same situations might no longer be experienced as problems.

It's just possible that troubles, reactions and unhappiness-es might go poof.

Which would also mean nothing about you, of course.

But it would feel better.

And that would probably be just fine with the Me, at least for a little while.

GOT FREE WILL?

June 27, 2017

People want to know if they have free will.

I mean, people reeeeeaaalllly want. to. know.

For millennia people have been asking, "Do I control my fate?" Since the ancient Greeks we've peppered spiritual leaders of every stripe with that question. Name any guru, thought leader or teacher; they've been asked over and over, "Do I have choice? Do I make my own destiny? Do I have free will?"

Naturally there have been a whoooooole lot of answers in those thousands of years. Unfortunately for the askers, most of the answers have been "No." And dang it, that's just not what people want to hear.

But it seems there's not much value in continuing to ask the same question for another 2 thousand years. So instead let's try asking something different for a change.

For instance, " *WHAT* cares" if there's free will or not? What gets so upset at the idea that it might not be the boss of all it surveys?

Notice the question isn't, " *Who* cares?" That assumes there is a person involved. And maybe one reason answers have been unsatisfying for all these centuries is because persons… "whos"… have agendas. And maybe this has nothing to do with "persons."

So *WHAT does* care if there's free will for humans?

Well, it's not that body your hand might be pointing to right now, as it sits there spellbound by the Mind-Tickler's usual brilliance. It's not skin, blood,

eyelashes, elbows, nostrils.

It's not the heart or brain either. Take either out of its container and put it on a plate in front of you and you've got… meat on a plate. Meat couldn't care less about free will. It won't even recognize those words, or you for that matter.

So that's not it.

Maybe it's that *sense* of "Me?" But…. that's just a sense, a feeling. A sense hasn't got the capacity to care about free will.

So, nope again.

Hmm, could it be nothing actually cares if there's free will?

But okay, let's say there is something that cares and we just haven't figured out what that is. Then whatever it is... why? Why does it care so much that it ignores the answers handed down for 2 thousand years?

Why is it so all-fired important that a person has free will?

Of course it would seem obvious that people might fervently wish for control, for doer-ship, for choice. Humans love to think the power to make life and ourselves the way we want is in our own hands, and that there's something we can do to fix things we don't like.

Although, if that control did exist, wouldn't we all be living the perfect-happiness-filled-just-as-we-want-it life? (You mean you don't? Huh.)

Well, never mind that. It sure still seems like we are responsible and make the choices. "I did this, my actions or lack of action made it happen. If it went bad I need to solve and correct it, and if I don't then there will be terrible consequences as a result of my mishandling things."

Interesting.

"I'm in control" opens the door for, "Bad me, failure me, loser me, irresponsible me."

Being in charge may not so much fun. Peaceful, it isn't.

Seems free will and choice may come with their delightful relatives responsibility, fault, failure, blame, shame and paralysis. Not to mention right wrong and should shouldn't, in the same posse.

Sure bartender, gimme some more o' that.

Lucky for us, maybe we've been off the hook all along. Because if we're not in charge of existence, then what happens is not our fault. We're in the passenger seat along for the ride, not in charge of what happens behind the wheel.

What a relief. What peace.

And then even if the mind runs to, "Well then we'll run amok in the streets and no one will take responsibility and no one will be in charge and terrible things will happen," we might notice that good things happen and have happened anyway. Terrible things happen and have happened anyway. With or without us in charge.

Existence is what it is. We're never going to run that show.

Which means it's irrelevant if we have free will, and irrelevant if we know it or not. It just doesn't matter.

Which also means there's nothing to lose by trying on the possibility that things are out of our hands.

And since "I have no choice, no free will, no control," brings relief and surrender...

Why not go where the peace is?

If we want choice so much, why not choose peace?

And then we might get to discover the view from the passenger side. Which just might have a pretty sweet will of its own.

UNLOVEABLE YOU

July 4, 2017

People think they are unlovable.

Not in the sense of thinking about it all the time or constantly crying Woe Is Me, but deep down, in the so-called heart, yes this is a wildly common thought.

(If mind is now saying, "Well not me! I don't think I'm unlovable!", I'll just say, OK you are that rare exception. Just you though. No one else.)

Anyway, not that it matters what we think, because this is just a thought and it's not us and it's not real and has no power and it's just words and … y'know, yada yada.

It's just that this particular thought is so pervasive and feels so core that it's a great doorway into a different way of experiencing.

So in today's Mind-Tickler I'm focusing on thought-content for a change. Because this one is everywhere, admitted or not.

Though I do realize that I'm not supposed to acknowledge thoughts of unlovability. Unlovability is bad. C'mon Judy, give us encouraging positives and empowerments! Give us manifesting! No one wants defeatist, discouraging negatives. That's so not cool.

See, this is why I can't have nice things. Because I'm going to talk about it anyway.

For instance, can you see that the positive-outlook stuff is not natural for us humans?

Look how hard we have to work for the positive, how we have to rehearse affirmations and take courses and read books about how to develop it. Look what a hard time we have forcing ourselves to accept compliments instead of believing them effortlessly. Look how much energy and push it takes, how squirmy it is, to say openly, "I am wonderful and lovable."

In contrast we don't have to work hard at all for the negative position. That comes one-two-three, even though we don't even want it.

Negative thoughts are the default, the start-point.

That's because the self story requires inadequacy in order to continue occupying so much mental real estate. Otherwise it starts to ebb away. And we can't have that.

But negative stories about ourselves can't be too obvious either. It's much harder to pretend that story is what we are when it is front and center. Which creates much craziness around trying to hide, change or not acknowledge the existence of unlovable-ness.

So many unwanted behaviors, addictions and reactions exist to keep this "secret' from showing: manipulating for love, trying to be some version of 'normal', relationship counseling, inquiry, self help books, cosmetic surgery, diets,12-steps and tons more. Even the need for agreement and 'like-minded people' is an attempt to hide unlovable-ness.

"See? Others agree with me! I'm part of a group! So I'm lovable! ... Right?"

And it's not enough that we buy this false story of lovability; we want others to buy into it too. We like people who think we're great. We don't like people who don't think much of us. Even though we secretly don't think much of ourselves, we want them to.

We just want to fool them.

And woe to all if we don't fool them. We get terribly hurt and furious with people who don't fall for our presentation. Oh they make us crazy! Parents who didn't "give us what we need," critical teachers, disapproving

unimpressed bosses. We want them to think we're great, dammit! "Hey don't you force me to notice my unlovability! How dare you! Look at me, I'm beautiful and smart and sexy and successful. Cmon, don't you see?"

Hello approval seeking. Hello in-authenticity.

Not to mention Comparing and Judgments, which, as any spiritual seeker knows, are Very Bad and should stop right now.

But we need them. When inadequacy is unacknowledged, we need to check ourselves against something, to find examples out there of both what we should be and aren't, and also what we're better than. Otherwise how are we going to know whether we're doing a good job of hiding the unlovability?

So this unlovable thing is very time consuming, a big part of what we've come to accept as who we are. So it's not going away anytime soon.

Which tells us that maybe the problem isn't unlovability.

Maybe it's the denial, the idea that we shouldn't be unlovable.

Because really, why not? I mean, let's say it's true, we are indeed unlovable.

So what?

Is it the end of the world? Is there no room for imperfect un-lovables here on this planet? Must everyone be loveable?

How monotonous would that be?

What would happen if we were able to stop trying to hide or pretend inadequacy isn't there?

And even though chicken-little mind might start trotting out visions of consequences and saying "Nooo! You'll die alone, under a bridge, never getting anything done!" right about now, it is just possible that the mind's presentations of disaster are (gasp) wrong, and that it's unable to predict the future.

So maybe we can at least consider not fighting unlovability. Just... consider. Because it could be it's the fighting and denial that has made us crazy. It could be that when we surrender to what (we think) we are, the relief in not fighting any more is huge.

"Yes I'm unlovable. That's how it is. So what. What's for dinner?"

It could be the end of trying endlessly to fix this Me thingy.

It could be the end of self-hatred.

Ironically. Paradoxically.

I mean, we might not even know who we are anymore.

Which, oddly enough, happens to be the desired outcome of so much spirituality and self-help.

And which just might be an easily, naturally positive experience. With no affirmations necessary.

Just the opposite, in fact.

Whoa.

YOU BE YOU, AND I'LL BE ME

July 25, 2017

Recently I read a Facebook post by a Spiritual Teacher, saying wise stuff about consciousness and common sense and how we are obviously a Self and that clearly awakening is about yada yada yada.

Further on down the page was another post by a vocal other Sage posting about Shifts and no one there and how they've got it and you don't and there's nothing you can do and xyz.

And then there was the currently-popular expounding about sitting with feelings and bypassing and pain stored in the body like it's a closet of some kind.

Going one more post down, it was now all about not reacting, not getting all feelinged-up no matter what the situation.

Bliss, love, compassion, big-self, little-self, no-self, witnessing, feeling, inquiring, not believing, not desiring, not reacting, loving what is.

Whew.

Of course you've noticed how many contradictory versions of awakening there appear to be.

All those different teachers saying all those different things with different stories and different descriptions of their Enlightenment.

WTH? I mean, shouldn't there be just one answer? One experience that indicates, "Yes! You did it! You got there!" Shouldn't there be a right way?

And boy they're insistent. So much rightness, so much certainty. So much arguing and mocking any disagreeing certainty.

So are they lying? All of them? Well, except for the only one who's right of course. Whichever one that is. But all those others, are they lying? How can so many contradictory stories not be lying, or at the least, wrong?

How is it possible they've all had such very different, contradictory, awakening experiences, and yet are describing Truth?

Although, that does sounds suspiciously like a point of view, and if a point of view is involved, that involves thought. And a person to think. So they can't even really be enlightened at all, right? Can they?

Hmmm.

Well, humans do like agreement. A lot. We like consistency and sameness. We categorize by alike, and group everything by its agreement to a point of view or perspective. And perspective is variable and depends on factors, which means its not Truth; it's just a viewpoint.

And then we like to corroborate. So we get busy loudly rejecting not-alike and arguing ferociously for alike.

But the fact is, regardless of human likings and inclinations…

Nature doesn't do duplicates. Nature doesn't do repeats. Even the most seemingly-identical twins have differences.

No two experiences are the same. That's how it works in this existence.

Which means once an experience has happened, it will never be repeated identically that way ever again. The key for that slot has been used. Every experience is One of a Kind.

Y'know, no foot in the same stream, etc etc etc.

So given that that is the case with everything in this universe, why wouldn't it also be true of awakening?

Which means... all those teachers and their versions of enlightenment and method and telling their point of view so you can Get It their way?

They can all be right.

They are stating their one version.

Though of course that also means their answers do absolutely no good for anyone else. Because that answer is taken. That experience has been done already, and it's not repeating or coming back around again.

So though you may very, very much want to know the How, as in, "How did you do it, Wise Teacher, and how can I duplicate your experience?"…

Maybe, "What should I do?" is the wrong question.

And though maybe sometimes it can help to have a guide to suggest some questions, or to help you focus on your version of actual experience vs thought…

And though maybe there's really nothing wrong with exploring other people's questions…

Still, the answers themselves? The descriptions of what you're aiming for?...

They're on you. Any answers can only be your one-of-a-kind version. No one can tell you how to find them, what to do, or describe what your experience is supposed to look like.

Because other peoples' experiences have already been taken. Those teachers' answers are useless to you.

What this also means though, is that when you do find your answer, it will not be The answer. Because there is no right enlightenment; there is no Only-One answer.

Yours will also be a point of view, just like Mr. or Ms. Wise-Teacher's. Because that's all anyone can ever be - a thought, an experience, a perspective and a point of view.

So you get to do your own version of awakening. And who is there to say it isn't The One Answer? Nobody.

Oh yes, you do you, Boo.

HAPPINESS?

August 22, 2017

Happiness.

We want it.

Hey we're *supposed* to be happy. It's our birthright.

Everyone knows this. Every fairy tale says so. In fact we're entitled not only to happy, but happy ever after.

Hmmm. Are we asking for much?

Naaah.

And if we're just ok, or neutral, or kind of blah, or, god help us, sad?

Not good enough! There's happy out there and we don't have it. Something's missing, we're not getting all we should have. Something's wrong.

And what happens to simple okness when we think we're lacking happiness? It's out the window, replaced by dissatisfaction.

Hey, that ain't happy!

The search for happiness actually makes us less happy.

Seems kind of unfair, doesn't it? Happiness is required, not optional, so there's a goal to get it, and yet the very existence of that goal keeps us from its achievement.

Aw hell.

But it's alright, because now that okness has been replaced with dissatisfaction, we have a project.

The Get Me More Happy! project. And in this project, there are rules and should's and things to Do.

There is a right life to live, and if done right, that will make us have more happy. We must not worry, we must be grateful, we must eat right, get enough sleep, make money, achieve potential, have friends, like ourselves, not compare to neighbors, not be judgmental, be married (in a non-arguing-marriage.)

Got it? All set!

Whew. That (incomplete) list of musts makes an awful lot of folks think there's something wrong with them.

And if the life we happen to live follows different rules, then nope, no happy for us!

Not measuring up to the rules and right-ways might make us even further dissatisfied with the life we have, and even more unhappy.

To hell with this moderately OK life with its not-a-lot-of-friends or its no-money or its not-enough sleep.

And now we notice the hum of dissatisfaction is near-constant. Something even more to be dissatisfied about.

Yup we're even dissatisfied with being dissatisfied.

This is an unwinnable game.

So what if it's not about, "How can I get more happy?"

What if it's not possible to eliminate dissatisfaction, at least not for long?

No matter how many fake smiles, meditations, inquiries, drugs, bolts of enlightenment lightening.

What if that sense of not-enough never permanently goes away?

The human may simply not be capable of this goal we keep striving for.

We can see how this could be. First, because despite all the claims, beliefs, and how-to's, no feeling lasts permanently.

Not even happiness.

And second, because that sense of, "I want more happiness, peace or enlightenment" is in itself dissatisfaction with what happiness, peace or enlightenment we already have.

Not-enough equals dissatisfied. Dissatisfied equals not-happy.

That unwinnable loop, happily, lets us off the hook.

Because if the human mind is incapable of being content with what it's got for more than a limited time, then dissatisfaction is normal and inescapable.

No point in fighting it because… inescapable.

And yet of course we do fight it, because that's inescapable too.

So then there's nothing we can do about wanting more happiness, and nothing we can do to get it, and nothing we can do about fighting to get more anyway.

This loop is not going to stop. There's nothing we can do about that either.

It is what it is. And what it is, is... OK.

So paradoxically, there might be some peace in accepting the possibility that as a species, we're not capable of holding on to real satisfaction for very long.

There might be some liberation in not having to get rid of dissatisfaction, not having to fix this, not having to do the Get Me More Happy project or live by its rules.

We might discover okness in breaking the rules and living alone, or not sleeping as much as we're supposed to, or eating French fries.

Who knows? That freedom from have-to-be-happy just might make us...

Happy.

For a while anyway.

WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?

August 29, 2017

Ever feel like you're missing something?

It's a very common feeling. For many, it feels constant, as if there's always something missing.

Love. Alcohol. Money. Sex. Satisfaction. Fun. Maybe just a sense of something… better.

Something's missing. Something.

There's wholeness somewhere, a completeness, and, well… you don't have it.

So of course it makes sense to try to fix this lack, fill this hole, by getting more complete. It's totally logical that you would try to attain money, get satisfaction or fun, achieve success, score some love or acclaim.

You might even do a million inquiries, trying to fix the messed-up, lacking individual you are so that you can be, finally, enough.

Yet somehow all that hasn't been enough either.

Because even when you get what you think is missing- when you get the love or the money or the new house or the drink- there is often still this empty sense of disappointment. Sometimes the attainment of everything you want even brings depression.

You might find yourself saying, "Is that all there is? " Which is just another way of saying, "I'm missing something. "

Even with all your dreams met, that feeling persists.

So could it be your solutions to this sense of missing something have been misdirected?

Maybe you've been looking for completeness in all the wrong places.

What if it's your focus on yourself, as an individual, that has confused things?

I realize that might seem like a strange question. But think about an individual wave on the ocean; if you focus on only the wave, you might miss that…

It's part of, made-up of and completely an extension of, the ocean.

Something much bigger than itself.

A part of a larger whole is never going to be complete on its own.

Which is why no amount of fixing that wave, making it curl better or giving it more water, will ever make it complete.

Of course, the ocean is always right there. It only feels like it's missing, when our focus is on that one tiny wave-part.

So perhaps it's the focus on self as an individual that creates the sense of not-enough.

Maybe you feel like you're missing something because when you think you're just this Me, you are indeed missing something.

You're missing that you're not this, this individual wave. You're missing that connectedness to people happens even when they're not physically in the same room with you, so it's not about body or location. You're missing that we're all breathing the same air, thinking the same thoughts, feeling the same feelings. You're missing that we all think we're a significant speck here on this insignificant speck of rock in the great big universe. You're missing that we're all held as objects within the same space. You're missing the vast vast space that contains little ol' all of us.

Yeah. That's a whole lot of missing something.

Maybe you can begin to see how useless more love or sex or money would be.

You've wanted to get back to wholeness. All while, seen or not, you've always been wholeness.

There's nothing to strive for, nowhere to "get back " to. You're already "there. "

Yay! Isn't this good news? It means you're already complete. And that it's just a matter of focus, of attention, that you haven't realized it.

Nothing is missing. There's nothing to do.

So the next time a wave of, "I'm missing something " swells up, perhaps you might play with shifting your attention to what we really are, and to noticing the connectedness, the completeness.

Maybe you don't have to focus quite so intently on the individual and what it thinks it's lacking.

Because who knows? Just that simple shift in attention might enable the exact same individual situations to feel…

completely

and fully

enough.

PLAYING DEAD

September 12, 2017

For about 2 weeks last month it looked like I possibly had cancer.

Turns out I don't, so NO WORRIES. (a little extra emphasis there just in case you're inclined to waste a good worry on me. No need, I promise.)

Perhaps this will sound strange but in those couple of weeks, I was oddly unafraid.

'Course, certain of my family and friends were hyperventilating, so maybe they had my share of the panic pie covered, leaving me to be calm just for balance in the universe.

It certainly wasn't always like this for me. In my 20s I'd anxiously check for illness despite actual ridiculously good health. Or I'd wake at night in terror of death when an ambulance or fire truck siren went by (which, since I lived in New York City, was often.) And airplane flying used to be the kind of adventure where the slightest sign of turbulence was clearly the start of a painful, miserable death, in my feverish little mind.

And yet here I was with a real possibility of cancer, and… nothing.

Weird.

This calm wasn't the kind of nihilistic not-caring-if-I-live-or-die stuff I see floating around Facebook or with clients sometimes. At this point I enjoy living as much as the next guy. Although again that wasn't always the case; I spent much of my earlier life with suicide comfortingly tucked in my back pocket for just in case.

Isn't that funny? I was terrified of death that might be imposed on me by illness or fire or airplane gods. But death at my own hand spelled comfort.

Control-freak much?

"Nooooo, don't make me see where I might be powerless, helpless or not the ruler of all I survey. No, show me instead how I have absolute power over life and death."

Yeah, not deluded at ALL.

So how to account for the change in Judy-attitude? I mean, I'm a lot older now, statistically much closer to the potential reality of death. Shouldn't I be more freaked out, not less?

Well who knows for sure why, but looking back over the last decade or so, it appears that seeing the power of powerlessness... changes things. There's such huge relief and such soaring beauty in surrendering to the truth of not being in charge, that fears of lack of control just... melt.

Experiencing that I have zero power over absolutely anything- not breath or heartbeat or body temperature or health and certainly not over death- (not to mention other people and situations) set me free of a lot of that fear I lugged around most of my life.

Which left the opportunity to enjoy life's ride, however long it lasts, without having to be the boss of it.

There's also been the blind luck and immense gratitude of personally experiencing, over and over again, that this body-thingy is simply not what I am, that what I am is not biological, not meat, and not a physical thing, which not only can't die, but… can't go anywhere.

I mean, it's everywhere. Where would it go that it isn't already?

So I'm no longer afraid of leaving, being gone, not being here.

Yes the body dies. It dies at all kinds of times from all kinds of things. And yes the ego or personality likes to stomp around crying, "But I don't

wannnnna die. I don't wannna hurt or be sick. I don't wannnna not be here anymore."

And still it's been so repeatedly clear that none of that has anything to do with what I am.

If this sounds like pie-in-the-sky BS spirituality, I do get that. And of course you don't have to ever take my word for anything.

On the other hand, just for fun, we can play a little with this right now, if you're up for it…

If you close your eyes and get still for a moment, you can begin to notice that your breath and hearing are effortlessly supporting you, and have been, all along. And then feel into whatever it is you really are. Don't bother trying to define or name that- we could call it consciousness or awareness or god or essence or Ralph - but naming it is a hindrance, not a help. Just feel into it as best you can; however you do that is perfect.

And then you can ask "what I really am" a question, and listen for a prompt very quiet answer. There's no need to know anything or figure out what is answering or agree with what it says. You're just asking the truest you, the real you whatever that is… if its name is (your name).

And listen for a yes or a no.

I've yet to find anyone who gets a "yes" answer.

You're not (your name). There's nothing wrong with (your name), in fact (your name) is pretty darned dear with all its dreams and likes and imperfections. It's just not what you are.

(Your name) can be foolish or ferocious or not loving or weak or angry or deficient. And what-I-really-am?

It just says yes.

And knowing now that the mind focuses on the small (Judy), on her pain and likes and dislikes, and misses the bigger, vaster truth….

Well, whatever that is, it's calm. And not afraid of no stinkin' cancer.

I'm not telling you this because it's what you're supposed to experience. I'm just sharing with you, because it's a kind of shaking-the-head wow. And it's lovely to have company with so much wow.

So Judy's still here, cancer-free. Who knows for how long. You're still here too.

We may as well have some fun with this gift, no?

yes

THE SECRET TO SUFFERING?

September 19, 2017

Sometimes a lucky little meme hits the jackpot and becomes a social media celebrity, getting Liked, loved and shared by hundreds or thousands of admiring humans.

This little guy above was one such star, getting posted worldwide and accumulating cheers and pumped fists along the way.

Seems cool, right? Maybe even inspiring. Certainly this meme makes a point no one could argue or disagree with. Everyone knows that's the right way to live, the right way to be.

Although, could be everyone's been drinking the Kool-Aid on this one.

Because this kind of "You-Can-Be-Better!" thinking is everywhere. Which means thought is comfortable with that approach. And considering how infrequently any commonly-accepted thought is true, maybe that comfort is worth a re-look.

And when we do look- ah, there it is... the clear, hidden-in-plain-sight message in any What-We-All-Should-Be meme like this one above. You... well, ok, there's no nice way... let's just face it…

You aren't good enough. Not as is. You should be different.

Notice how that feels? Yeah. Bad.

There's an ideal way to be. You're not it.

Better fix that.

Hello self help, inquiry, therapy, meditation, satsangs and spiritual seeking.

Billions and billions are spent on fixing broken humans.

And yet, not only do you fail to live up to the ideal, you also never seem to get properly fixed. There's always another situation, another reaction, another face-palmed What-have-I-done.

Hello deficient, inadequate, bad person. Hello loser.

Hello to the exact opposite of what you're going for with all that self-improvement.

And then, just for added fun, you also fail at self-acceptance (another should.) Because how can anyone be self-accepting while simultaneously trying to make themselves "better?"

This is crazy making stuff. It starts to make sense why so many people are unhappy.

Self improvement is an unwinnable game.

And with the constant mass-hypnosis of memes and "You should think like this" self-help books, blogs, and motivational articles, you might be forgiven for missing…

that reaching the goal of repaired and fixed You may not even be possible. I mean, who's vulnerable, forgiving, honest and open minded, all the time?

Really, who would even want to be? *(If in doubt, maybe start with just forgiving and being more vulnerable to Donald Trump right now.)*

More relevantly, what never seems to get asked while the focus is on how to be better, is...

Should you be improved, at all?

After all, existence gives all of us this incredible buffet ... 7-billion diverse experiences and flavors and styles of human... and we in our arrogance say, "No! We should only be honest! We should only make a difference! Only

open-minded, only brave, only vulnerable is acceptable. Anything else is bad and Not. Good. Enough."

Humans are constantly saying*NO* to existence as it is. We're constantly insisting we know better than existence how things should be.

Meanwhile, no one seems to notice whether all those should's actually succeed in fixing anything anyway. I mean, ask any addict if, "*You shouldn't do that!*" ever kept them from doing that. Or even check in yourself...did reading the meme above telling you to "*Be honest*" actually make you honest? *(Be honest now)*

Such silliness. Just to keep you from noticing what you actually are.

Because really, let's say it's true and you're really not vulnerable enough, not following your heart enough, not feeling complete on your own. Let's say it's true that there's tons of need for improvement in little ol' you.

Ok. So?

Is there not room on this planet for the less-than-perfect? Is it really worth a lifetime of fixing what might be just fine as is, even if it's broken and incomplete?

Could it be that improving the present is... unnecessary?

Ok then, so, what to do? Should there be no shoulds?

Well, it seems there should be.

Because "People shouldn't should on themselves" is just more of the same, more fixing, more barely disguised You're-not-doing-it-right-itis.

Luckily there's no need to change all the Fix-You messages, because after all, what for? Besides, there are sooo many; there's no way to stop them even if you wanted to.

The messages can be noticed, though. You can notice the non-stop, not-even-hidden messages everywhere.

You might find that it feels better to see the Make-It-Better game in all its ever-present glory. Not because it shouldn't be played, but because seeing the game can shift the game. Without any *should* trying to force change.

And you *can* notice if what you are is so gosh-darned awful. Unimproved. As you are.

Now*that*might be a make-a-difference experience. That might even be*(gasp)* fun. And fun doesn't need fixing.

And oh my gosh, you might even notice what's here and what isn't, and that those are just synonyms for "presence."

Maybe AS IT IS is AS IT SHOULD BE. And has always been, all this time.

Wow. Talk about making a difference.

SELF MEET NO SELF

September 26, 2017

It's been a while, so today's Mind-Tickler is brought to you by the Woo.

This morning I looked up and noticed a black spot moving on my wall. I live in the land of black widow spiders and other bitey things, so that spot was not to be ignored. I got closer and saw … there was nothing there.

Yup I distinctly saw something that wasn't there.

Perhaps you spiritual types can guess where I'm goin' with this.

This Me, the Myself-thingy we all speak of with such authority, such certainty… I shall herewith call it Spot.

Because look more closely and… it ain't there.

Oh it does feel like the self is there. It does feel like, "Of course there's a me!" Right?

Yeah. I was sure I saw a spot today too.

"Feels like" and "seems like" are both useless and uninformative when it comes to Spot.

So let's just get the proof out of the way shall we?

You've heard ad nauseam that we are not the body. That means if I ask you to point to You, to the Self, to Spot, and you turn an index finger towards that body and happily say, "I'm right here!", well, what exactly are you pointing to?

Are you saying the cheeks, collarbone, nose hairs- they're what you are? Or the brain or heart- are you saying if you take them out of the body and put them on a table, they'll do anything more than just sit there like the meat they are?

Nah that stuff isn't You.

Or perhaps it "feels like" your Self is inside - in the head maybe, or the chest. Although, I'm pretty sure there's no little you in there, sitting on a chaise lounge popping bonbons, wondering what took you so long to find him or her.

No, no MRI has ever revealed the Self, because there's no place or location for it inside the body.

Besides, if Spot is not physical and yet is somehow trapped in there and too stupid to take any of the many exits out, well then…

if it's that dumb it may not even be worth bothering to find.

Y'know?

Ok. So.

How does it happen that something so certain and so seemingly obvious is, on closer exam, not actually there?

Well, like my spot on the wall, the Self, the Me, seems real because it seems locatable. We locate, as in literally give it a solid place.

How? We describe. We compare. We monitor "How am I doing?" at all times.

"How am I feeling? Was I friendly enough? Did they like me? Am I good enough? Am I smart? Oh man I'm a loser, a wuss, unlovable. I am better than that person and not as good as that one."

"I Am." Boom. Location.

Comparison and self-monitoring give a solidity and a sense of Spot. Words place us into existence.

Ok ok, fine, so who cares? Why does this even matter?

Well, actually it doesn't. Truly.

Despite all those earnest teachers and spiritual seekers' insistence, the illusion of Self doesn't ever have to be seen. No one ever has to know that they're seeing spots that aren't there.

So if you've done a lot of spiritual seeking, you can be perfectly within your rights to say, "Screw it," and give that time-suck a rest at last.

Although it does feel like the Self-illusion-thingy suffers. The placement of and insistence on the existence of Spot feels awful, as lies so often do.

Which is not the worst thing in the world. Feelings of all kinds are here to be felt after all.

It's just also that ... we're not always up for those feels.

So if it seems like a break from hurting might be nice once in a while, seeing that Spot is a delusion can help some of that day to day suffering, ease.

And more ease might be ok, and could very well just be a Spot you'd feel happier to see is... not there.

GOT THOUGHTS?

October 3, 2017

Want to play a game?

Think the following thoughts:
I want to stomp a pineapple.
I am going to stomp a pineapple.
I am stomping a pineapple.

Are you stomping a pineapple? Um… *please say no*. Ok, good.

And now that these thoughts have come along, do you have a burning urge to run out and stomp a pineapple?

'Course not.

Know what this tells us?

It tells us it doesn't matter what we think.

Shut up. This is an outrage! How can the Mind-Tickler be so wrong?

Hopefully your indignation at this heresy is not so great that you run for the unsubscribe button, leaving behind a sad Mind-Tickler, who loves you and wants only good things for you.

Ok, ok, so... back to our thoughts of stomping a pineapple… notice all I have to do is write that, and you think it, imagine it, see it happening in your mind's eye. And yet, no pineapple stomping is actually happening.

Why not?

Because those thoughts do not have the power to make you stomp anything. If they did, you'd be craving some pineapple slush right now. But no.

Same you, sitting in the same chair. Absolutely nothing going on.

Thoughts… those traditional spiritual bad guys in urgent need of rehabilitation and cessation via meditation, inquiry, therapy and drugs...?

Harmless. Powerless. Meaningless.

And now think of an orange triangle. Or a gun. Or a child. Or a puppy. Or a mean person. What differentiates the thought of a triangle, gun, puppy or meanie from the pineapple?

Nothing. They're all the same.

All thoughts are the same. No matter what they're about, they're all made of the same stuff.

Which happens to be a whole lotta nuthin. I mean, what are they anyway? Puffs of air, space, unicorn tails, what?

Some words, mental pixels, sensations. That's all. Just a collection of sounds, letters, shapes and spaces.

And sounds, spaces and shapes have no inherent meaning.

Still, it does feel like they have meaning, yes. And what exactly would be supplying this meaning?

More thought. Nothing, on top of nothing, on top of nothing.

Now of course I realize that in this day of mass shootings and natural disasters and worldwide suffering, even bothering to pay attention to whether thoughts matter can seem like a frivolous esoteric nonsense exercise. "Who cares?" may well be the thought of the moment.

But rather than too-much-time-on-our-hands BS, what if our seeing that 'thought is a bunch of harmless nothing' could actually be what sets us free

of the need to escape thinking in the first place? And therefore more free to deal with things that do matter?

I mean, all that time and inward-gazing devoted to acquiring less-painful rumination…

Can you see how freeing it might be instead to not have to monitor every fleeting mental lashing, to not have to correct it, hate yourself for it, or turn it a "positive?"

What a relief.

A relief that comes not from fixing thoughts, but by seeing that they come, they go, and they just don't matter.

Which means maybe we could finally leave them alone. To run free! To blow through and then out. To live their brief little thought-lives un-attacked by the sharp wagging fingers of supposed-to's and get-betters and not-good-enoughs.

That might leave us free to help others, or to figure out how to airlift supplies, or to be available to new solutions. Or maybe we could spend an afternoon with loved ones or working out or just staring at the ceiling, without hating ourselves for being unproductive or lazy or overwhelmed with pain.

Seeing that thoughts don't matter just might make the world a better place for everyone. And interestingly, might also provide exactly what we wanted fixed, inquired and meditated thinking to accomplish in the first place...

A quieter mind, easier feelings, and the grace to not be owned by some meaningless words.

It might be worth finding out.

Don't you think?

(No pineapples were harmed in the writing of this message.)

FOCUS HOCUS POCUS

October 10, 2017

Lots and lots of people are depressed or anxious. I used to be one of them. Maybe to some degree or another, you too?

Depression and anxiety are the go-to feelings of our time. Huge swaths of the population are on medication, meditation or in therapy. If there was an award for most pervasive feelings, depression and anxiety would be collecting their statuettes.

So it's not just you. You're in good company.

In fact so much company that, just going by sheer numbers, depression and anxiety might be considered… normal.

Yet somehow it feels like you are alone, weird, and the primary damaged one in the world. Thought says, "Yeah well they're not hurting as much as I am. They're not as messed up as I."

You're the one who hurts more than others, who hurts more than can be borne.

And maybe millions of others think the exact same thing, but who can care about that when one's own misery is so big?

You see how the focus is all about you, right? What's wrong with you, why this is happening to you, how to fix you so it stops in the future and you get yourself right.

Which is why depression and anxiety seem like they can't be ignored. Because they clearly mean there's something very wrong. With you.

All attention points to broken, messed up you.

Hmmm, what might benefit from all that thinking about the Me-me-me, I wonder?

And then, in that laser-focus on suffering and how awful it is and trying to solve it with helpful ideas like maybe, "I know! I'll just off myself," what's not being noticed?

Okness is not being noticed. The Okness you have right in this very moment. Already.

You know, Okness- air to breathe, gravity to hold you, space to move in, elbows, heart, lungs, internet, phone, someone to talk to on that phone, computer, skin to hold the insides in, pets, something to sit on, clothes, shoes, a functioning brain (to whatever extent), water, thumbs, knees, ears, sight, hair not on fire, laughter and a mind capable of getting the joke, a neck to hold up your head, cool breezes, shade, sun, sky, colors, eyelids, children, music, chocolate, taste buds, language… (feel free to continue adding your own).

And thought says, "Oh please. Who cares about air and gravity when I feel so baaadddd?"

Even though without them, you'd have much bigger problems than depression.

Thought says, "Well never mind all that okness stuff. I've got real problems."

Yes, let's disregard the vast, far more comprehensive amount of absolute perfection present at all times and instead focus on a small percentage of body sensation that is supposedly not ok.

We say, "I'm depressed," when actually there's only a drop of depression or fear in a giant sea of otherwise pretty darn good.

Now I realize at this point that there may be much annoyance with The Mind-Tickler for not getting how great your suffering is.

You want your misery validated. I do understand this.

But… can you see how strong the desire is to keep the focus on the suffering?

Suffering- the thing you don't want- is supposed to be paid attention to, instead of paying attention to peace or not-pain, the thing you do want.

Can you see how that focus actually perpetuates suffering and makes things seem worse and feel worse than they are?

It is not possible to feel better that way.

Because insistent attention to pain basically ignores the okness that is already here and present and says… it's not good enough.

Thereby changing ok to not ok.

That's quite a magic trick.

Thought does not want you to feel better.

Thought wants a problem to think about, to ruminate on, to solve. It wants to get to the "root" of things, wants to know why, wants to figure out how to prevent trouble in the future. It wants to describe where in the body feeling happens and analyze what the feeling is "like."

Thought wants your attention on solutions. Drugs! Enlightenment! Therapy! Om!

Depression and anxiety are job security for the mind.

So of course it's not that pain doesn't hurt. And of course you'd rather be without it. But focusing on depression or anxiety, "sitting with" either, describing, "listening" to, or trying to make them go away, may make it impossible to see that there's not nearly as much there as you… think.

Focus on suffering makes pain seem to be more than it actually is, and creates a sense of lack of okness.

When actually we're all quite rich in okness. Overflowing, in fact.

And that shift in focus, even every once in a while, from what's supposedly lacking to what's plentiful, might just change your experience of... everything.

It might be, surprisingly… enough.

You might be enough. (gasp)

And because I know how much you want it, this I wish for you.

And I can be generous in that wish, because no matter what hocus pocus is focused on, I know you've already won the magic you're looking for.

LIFE'S PURPOSE

October 17, 2017

There's got to be a purpose for our lives. Some point. Some meaning. Something that separates us from the apes.

Right?

For centuries, so many people have been absolutely certain there's a reason for our existence, and all we need to do is find it.

We're here to be the best we can be, or to add value, or to help others, or to grow, learn, attain, reach potential… or… something.

We can't be living only to live, to experience this Now.

No, we need a reason. Otherwise why bother being here at all?

Although... it doesn't seem like bacteria or dust mites or dolphins struggle over, "What's the point of being alive? If I don't have purpose, maybe I shouldn't be."

In fact without human intervention, other creatures seem to be pretty darned content. You only need a few minutes on You-tube to see all those goats, cows, chickens, puppies, kittens, birds, snakes, elephants, tigers, lions, hedgehogs, whales, dolphins and squirrels experiencing the present without a purpose and doing just fine.

They all seem to be pointlessly making do, experiencing existence as is, present, non judgmental, and enough.

Which sounds suspiciously like what an awful lot of spiritual seekers have been trying to achieve for ages. And here are all those lesser, non-human

species already doing it.

Huh.

Yet we humans are certain we're more and better than just the beasts. We're different. We need more than just experience for its own sake.

As a result, we get to have the suffering-about-lack-of-meaning market all to ourselves. Other creatures don't hurt this particular way. Just lucky us.

Because as it turns out, needing a purpose feels awful. Lacking a point in life comes with confusion, angst, existential debate, and failure.

All of which is even more distinctly-human suffering. It's the extra-suffer cherry on top of dissatisfaction, when we insist there's a lifelong purpose to sperm and egg connecting randomly.

I mean, if we compare needing a point to not-needing a point... Let's see- Just being, simply because we are, vs. Being here to accomplish something, achieve something or figure something out. Which is more peaceful?

Duh.

Are we so sure we want that obligation? It's miserable.

And since no one knows for sure whether there actually is a purpose to our existence, other than by the insistent conviction of stray human thoughts…

Well then, why not go where the peace is?

Because it could very well be that human life really is not more important than other life forms, and really not about anything. It could very well be that we're simply here to live and experience, with no because or why or reason at all.

Life may always have been just a random present-only experience happening, for us just like all the others on this shared planet. We just may not have noticed.

Noticing now though, can let us off the hook finally, with no need for self-blame, failure, fault and seeking. Nothing to measure up to, nothing missing, nothing lacking.

Ahhh. Relief.

A relief that might be what truth looks like.

So that, unencumbered by finding meaning, purpose or point, we can just be alive. Just experiencing, just because. Without seeking, without improvement, without attaining.

Yeah.

Yay.

Whew.

What's for dinner?

LOCATED YOU

October 24, 2017

Where's you? The real, true you, whatever that is?

For most of us, the immediate, obvious answer is, "Duh, I'm right here!"

And if asked what knows that you're right there, perhaps the answer would be, "Sheesh Mind-Tickler, another stupid question. The brain knows." Or maybe, "The mind knows." Or, "The ego knows."

Whichever answer, it's as if there's no possibility of anything other than you/brain/ego, the locus of everything, master of all it surveys.

Though that's kind of like an ant saying, "I am all there is. There is nothing bigger than myself, nothing I don't know, nothing I can't see." While meanwhile the much larger human, unseen and unnoticed, is watching the ant scurry.

So… just for fun, I wonder if the possibility could be considered, just for a moment, because there's no harm in that, is there?, that there's an awareness bigger than the You, more than skin, blood, hair, nerve endings and spinal fluid. Perhaps imagine that there's a consciousness that's more far-reaching than the body or sense of self-thingy that is constantly and unceasingly stealing credit for its own importance. If that were somehow so, how would the much smaller Me pull off a heist of such narrowed attention successfully?

Put another way, how can infinite vastness be reduced to a small, self-focused, self-centered, seemingly-all-there-is, of-course-it's-right-here, very-certain-it-knows-stuff, much-smaller thing?

Aka the Me.

How is that clear sense of, "I'm right here!" created?

Well, in order for the sense of self to feel with such sureness that it's the center of everything, options have to be narrowed. Focus has to be narrowed to one point. The Me point.

Because vastness is too everywhere, too amorphous, and too much bigger than what is trying to perceive it. It's incomprehensible for the Me. So there has to be a small, specific and pointable-to location.

But how?

Basically, it's named. Identified. Described. It sounds like, "I am a good person, I am a loser, I am smart, I am lazy, I am weak, I am unlovable, I am unfairly treated, I am broken."

Here I am, I am, I am.

Located, located, located.

Of course that takes lots of repetition, monitoring and convincing. The describing must continue at all times. "Damn I did it again. Loser. Loser. Loser." Sort of like a salesman who doesn't dare shut up and stop talking for a second, else his prospect might notice that the product is nothing but air.

Which is why self-description and monitoring rarely let up. (And why there's always another thought to inquire into.)

So labels and identity provide a sense of location within the vastness of space. The words place us somewhere. That's how we narrow down into "Right HERE."

"Here's me. The one who had harmful parents and a mean spouse, who doesn't have enough money, who's alone and unloved."

Here's Me, the focal point in all that spaciousness.

Which is fine. Because it turns out we need that sense of self. We need identity and roles and a story in order to function in this dream world.

Because vastness can't drive, or feed the dog, or hug a child, catch a ball, drive a car, tie shoelaces. Vastness can't sew a button. It has to be made it smaller.

Who knew? Despite all that inquiry, analysis and personal development, turns out the limiting of infinite options is not a problem but actually necessary in order to be a person, in order to exist as sense of self.

In order to BE.

Because we have to be located somewhere. Otherwise we're just space. And how do we hold onto that? There's nothing to grab onto.

So there will continue to be roles and identity stories, which will often seem true and in need of defense, analysis and justification. We'll continue to put on and take off roles like a t-shirt. Today the Bitch t-shirt. Tomorrow the Loser shirt. In between Winner! for a few minutes. On and off, on and off the t-shirt goes, placing You in the center of things.

Identity is vastness in a t-shirt. No big deal. We have to wear something.

So the few seconds of spaciousness we might get in between changing t-shirts? Yay for those! And perhaps also yay that they're only brief respites.

Because otherwise it's all just too big.

How lucky we are, having a cozy, comforting little place of limiting identity just for us.

Right here.

Ah. Here we are.

ERADICATING THE SELF?

October 31, 2017

Ah people living everyday life. So complicated, so messy, so boring, agitating and full of this-isn't-rights, All that unwanted craziness, lust, addiction, fear, and trying to get others to play nice.

So much wrong. I mean…Trump, for goodness' sake.

It would surely be better to leave all that behind, awaken forever, see through the self, and never again be troubled by stupid pesky ego and its many faults, inconsistencies, annoying habits, painful emotions.

Though it's not like you haven't tried to wake up from this difficult dream. All that inquiry, self help and spiritual books, therapy, meditation, one retreat after another, yoga… y'know, sheesh.

And yet somehow the sense of self hangs on. Or maybe it left for a while and now it's back. Maybe you had several, "Aha I see!" weeks or months and then a family member triggered you, you lost a job, got painfully sick.

Could it be the darn self is not going to go away?

Ack! But, but… c'mon, what about all those teachers sharing their carrots, I mean, pearls? All those Facebook posts and quotes about how amazing it is once you're granted specialness by the universe, or once you inquire correctly or more often or every time you feel something.

Although if you read carefully, most honest teachers don't actually say the self/ego disappears. In fact, most say exactly the opposite.

I mean, you've probably noticed that those revered teachers (the not-dead ones) are still here too. Adya, Rupert, Jeff... there they are, still

recognizably... themselves. And looking back, it's clear that mixed-up everyday life continued unabated for Alan Watts, Nisargadatta and Krishnamurti, all of whose foibles and addictions persisted and lived out just as strongly after awakening.

It turns out that one can wish for a better Me, or see what's real and what isn't at last, but either way, well... you know... Chop wood, carry water, chain-smoke cigarettes, drink too much, lust like a fiend, get mad, cry, laugh, drive, argue, dance, worry, eat, fake it, dream.

Same life. Same you.

And also...different. Too. Both. Simultaneously.

So maybe it makes sense to finally make friends with that wacky personality. Because unless you end up in a coma, it's not going anywhere. Awake or asleep, the everyday you is what life looks like. Quirks continue, likes and preferences continue, recognizable style continues.

Which means maybe you can give yourself a break from all the fixing. aspiring, goal chasing, and improving, and just...(gasp) live.

And which particularly makes sense when you consider the possibility that experience is what we are. As in, not the one who is experiencing, but experience itself.

Not watching or witnessing. Being. This thought, this color, this sound, this sensation. Moving, flowing. Uncentered. Unlocatable.

If that's what we are (because what else could we be?) well then… where's that going to go?

So the self may be fiction and yet it's still here, acting as if, the story continuing on. At the same time, constantly-moving experience is happening too. Simultaneously.

Self and (rather than or) no self.

Which is great, if you have a desire to understand. Because if your particular brand of spirituality includes oneness and no separation…well here it is, this is what it looks like. It's right here. One experience. Both ego and non-ego. Watcher, watched and neither.

Already inclusive, already accepting, already now. Nothing to do, nothing to attain, nothing to fix, nowhere to get.

Life lived. Here now, as all possibilities, styles and versions.

How could it be otherwise?

THE THOUGHT MAZE

November 7, 2017

What's for dinner? My arm's asleep. You're doing that wrong. I shouldn't have said that. Are those carrots? I'm wasting my life. They don't like me. Oh what a pretty flower! I need to do something. I don't get it. I want to get it. I'll never get it. There's not enough money. I'm bad. My shoelace is untied. I'm alone unloved and abandoned. I don't like this. I do like this. Like, like, like. Don't like, don't like, don't like. I'll never be good enough. I'm too old. Where's the cat?

Thought. It's what's for dinner. Always something to chew on. Always another helping coming right up.

In fact there's so much that it feels as if we get lost in thought, or caught in thought. Like it's some kind of magical thicket or forest or maze or something.

Although if we pay attention we can see that there's nothing there, no maze, nothing to keep us trapped inside anything. Just some words, some sounds. It could as easily be, "Arooth mekinnel pariseem" as, "I'm not good enough."

Sounds, letters, shapes. That's about it.

'Course, we attribute meaning to some sounds.

Which thought just loves. Because meaning is where pain lives.

"Alumm halleee fersid?" Nothing. "Krulleee?" Nope. "I'll die alone and unloved?" Now we're talking. Now we've got something to hold on to. Because those words mean we are doomed, not enough as is, inadequate.

Those words mean we are.

"Blah blah kurleee blah flower blah failure blah enough blah dinner blah misgilibee." "Blah" is not painful, "misgilibee" is not painful, "flower" is not painful. "Failure" is. Because it's meaning about Me. That comes with pain, which solidly locks the sense of self into feeling real.

No meaning, no pain. No pain, no importance. No importance, no trap. And no problem.

Put another way, where there's pain, there's self.

Which is why it can seem so important to focus on the thoughts that seem to generate difficult feelings. We spend so much time figuring out which hurt and what they mean and whether we agree with them or like them or believe them or whether they're true. We're devoted to stopping thoughts, changing them, having more positive ones, and not letting them get the better of us.

Busy busy busy. Thinking thinking thinking.

The self is identified with all that activity.

So perhaps we could consider instead, just for a moment, whether it actually even matters what we think, what thoughts are about, or whether we believe them.

Because it could just be we haven't noticed that, "Oh look, a penny!" is exactly the same in power and importance as, "There's something wrong with me."

And even though for some Mind-Tickler readers this is a scandalous idea, still it might be that what thoughts are about is not what it's about.

Because without all the focus and attention we dedicatedly give them, thoughts are just radio playing in the background. Background sound doesn't have to be changed or fixed. It can just play on. No biggie.

And the feeling that's left when thought plays its meandering blah blah songs without scrutiny, analysis, focus, or attention… well, it's pretty sweet. In fact it's the opposite of painful, for a change.

Somehow all that very important problematic stuff suddenly isn't a problem.

Same life, same Me, same thoughts. Just the "So what?" is new.

We may find that one thought is as good and as equal as the next. And the next. And the next. And the next. And that nothing has to be done about any of it.

Which might make that whole maze thing a whole bunch of nothing.

Now there's something to chew on and eat through for dinner.

DOES THIS LIKE MAKE ME LOOK BAD?

November 14, 2017

"Today on Facebook I saw how great my friends are doing- all their beautiful, clever, and authentically touching posts, and I felt so peaceful and happy."

Said no one ever.

No one goes on social media and feels better. In fact, anyone prone to depression, anxiety or addiction will find that social media makes all that worse.

There is no peace on Facebook. And there never will be no matter how many spiritual quotes show up in an attempt to make the posters appear wise and evolved, or how many funny memes make us LOL.

"Show" and "Appear" are the operative words. Because social media is all about what things look like, not what they are.

It looks like those are real people, but actually social media is entirely words and images- there are no real people on pixels.

It looks like people are having great experiences, or lovely transformative peace. Never mind that the experiences can't be all that satisfying, since right in the middle of them, posters feel the urgent need to leap up and start typing, trying to get others to coo over the presentation.

It looks like folks are being honest, authentic and "true to themselves." (such a funny expression, whatever it even means.) Even though they block anyone who criticizes or doesn't buy the story they are presenting.

It looks like people don't care about approval, while zealously keeping tabs on numbers of Likes.

Social media is about stories of living, stories of people, stories of experience, not actual life, people, experience. It's reports and descriptions, not living.

Social media is the unreal pretending to be real, 24/7.

Not that this kind of pretending is new. Presenting a false self as if it was real is what humans have been doing for thousands of years. Social media just exaggerates that lie and makes it easier, so that now there is no let-up of the self-lie. There's no time off. Now we can polish our self-image, rate it, compare it and defend it… All. Day. Long.

Whew.

Surely that's just what humankind needs… new ways to pretend we are what we aren't, and more ammunition for self evaluation, self consciousness, self promotion, self hate, and self criticism.

That'll make anyone happy and peaceful, right? Yay!

Now of course The Mind-Tickler is not saying anyone should leave social media. It's just that in any form, on any platform, pretending to be a self hurts.

So if life seems especially difficult or painful, it might make sense to not overlook the slow-torture drip-drip-drip of self-making going on on social media. And to give the Looks Likes a chance to relax for a bit.

Who knows, it might even be nice to actually be content and peaceful rather than just appearing so.

Y'know, just for fun, and the possibility of... actual experience.

THE TEACHER MYTH

December 12, 2017

This past week brought exposés of several popular spiritual gurus and teachers. There was lots of head shaking and "I knew it!" ringing through social media. Other Sages jumped on and enjoyed riding that bandwagon to new public exposure for themselves.

And somehow, many seemingly reasonable people took this opportunity to endorse and sing the praises of their own personal favorite other spiritual teacher.

Yes, hearing about how imperfect certain gurus are inspired a fair amount of rousing and heartfelt, "Yeah, that's terrible! Not my favorite teacher though! Mine's great!"

Because naturally, unlike the scheming subjects of this or that article, these other teachers are the real deal- peaceful, kind, loving persons who have become ego-less and have their stuff together. So decent, so honest, so lacking pretense.

The irony of posting such praises while other gurus came tumbling down seems to have been lost on the writers.

Of course, most of us only know teachers by what they present to the world- writings, recordings, satsangs etc. And those presentations are usually… um, selective.

Back when I was in the inner circle of a particular spiritual teacher, a friend said, "Judy (this teacher) is barely there. They're so evolved they've almost disappeared." *Proper pronouns avoided to protect the innocent.

At that point though, I had had my own up-close experiences with this person and knew that what my friend said was nonsense.

First, because this teacher had secrets and plenty of ego. And second... because no one disappears.

Seekers blind to the myth in, "People can/should disappear into peace, no-ego and bliss" are ripe for disappointment and abuse. Not to mention poverty.

The idea that it's possible to be ego-less, that there's a right way for humans to be, that peace is more evolved than reaction, that it's possible to "get there"….

Well, let's call all that, "wishful thinking."

Because there has never been a single guru or teacher who wasn't flawed, some of them mightily so. Nisargadatta, Krishnamurti, Ramana, Alan Watts, Adi Da, Andrew Cohen, Osho, Swami this or that… we could go on and on. None were saints. In their personal lives, they've all been messed up humans just like everyone else.

If you think yours is the exception, well, welcome to comparing, judging, and striving to become. Which, it might be noticed, is perhaps the opposite of what you've supposedly been seeking.

No one is "the real deal." Because the real deal itself isn't real. It's a cruel fantasy that keeps folks dissatisfied with themselves and in thrall to some supposedly superior other.

This would make anyone blind to their own value.

So if it's really necessary to Be Like someone, maybe it's possible to Be Like… you. Flawed, doing your best, imperfect you.

Because once we give up the fiction that there's a right way to be, we no longer have to measure ourselves against a myth. We get to see that there's nothing wrong with our own version of human.

Which is why, if you are a follower or even just an admirer of any Sage, I wish you open eyes. I wish you dashed hopes and bubbles burst. I wish you the relief and clarity of no hope.

May you be blessed with disillusionment and abandoned dreams.

I couldn't imagine a better holiday gift for you than this.

Enjoy.

RECIPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

December 26, 2017

It's no secret this time of year is hard for a lot of folks.

Even if it's not that intense for you, or you're not one to annually start looking for the exit, still, who doesn't have at least some nagging sadness, irritation, anxiousness or regret this time of year?

No one, that's who.

Which makes total sense if you look at the recipe for misery that has become an end of year holiday tradition for so many.

1). Expectation. Start with an empty bowl and fill it to the brim.

Asking for much? Nah. Only unrelenting happiness, love and joy! Family, party invitations, smiling, not too drunk faces? Must-haves. Happy happy happy! Never mind that if there are people around, pretty likely they're the very ones that have perfected various button-pushes for years. Y'know, kind of like the annual sharpening of the spears.

2). Comparison. Mix in the whole bottle.

That family member is successful and you're not. That old flame is married and you're not. That one has kids, they still like their parents and aren't addicted to whipped cream. You? No, no and no. Those others are thinner, fitter, younger, prettier, wealthier. They have all their hair, a savings account, more parties, more friends. That one is enlightened, for crying out loud. You? Pfffft.

Dammit.

3) Self evaluation. Fold in a year's worth.

Look backward. How'd you do this year- is this the life you wanted at the end of 2016? Hah. Look at you alone, again, head deep in the pumpkin pie. Did you achieve, find true love, workout, get out of debt, do well as a parent? 'Course not. Loser.

Few of us measure up in the best of times, let alone at this time of "reflection." Aka "Another year gone; what have I done." After all, odds are you're looking at pretty much the same failures as last year. And the year before that.

4) Future. Bake in those resolutions. Time to fix the mess that is your life.

Look forward. Make a list of those finally-get-to-it plans for redemption. Even though you're probably just lining up your failures for next year's step 3 (see above), still, may as well start next holiday season's potential "You blew it's" early. Because c'mon, planning fix-its for the future can always be counted on to bring ease, peace and the end of anxiety. Right?

Mix steps 1 through 4 together thoroughly. Mmmm. Smell the doom, failure and tears along with strong whiskey and/or 420 at this point.

Now that's holiday winning.

And one miserable fruitcake. Not the concoction. You.

Is it any wonder the holidays are less than jolly for so many people? Could there be a more effective ouch-filled recipe?

Not likely.

Although... if it's any consolation, despite thought saying, "It's just you," at least odds are good that everyone else is going through some version of the exact same thing you are. While they're pretending to be joyful, of course. Just like you.

Because for pretty much everyone, the condition of being human comes with thoughts of More, Not Good Enough, and Inadequate Life

Accomplishments.

No matter what you've actually got, tried or accomplished.

So for a dash of something different, you might try the following recipe...

Maybe you're right- you're actually not good enough.

Maybe none of us is.

Because no one measures up to a fantasy existence where everything is only sweetness and families sing joy-fueled carols without any glimpse of trigger, or where money, love, happiness and self-esteem are overly plentiful.

So maybe you don't have to try so hard to fake not-possible ideals. Maybe it's possible to finally learn to make do with… this.

And maybe that could be OK.

Because your imperfect messed-up but always interesting personality might just be the ideal personification of what it is to be human.

Which means you fit right in. Perfectly imperfect as you are.

Oh my gosh, could it be you're good enough?

What a crazy concept!

That's why I'm wishing you a giant slice of 'So What, This Is Good Enough' pie.

With extra As-You-Are a la mode.

Yummm.

So from one fruitcake to another….

Love you, and happy good enough.

ENLIGHTENMENT VIA PAIN

January 8, 2018

This weekend my 86 year old mom fell and ended up in the hospital with broken bones and a lot of pain.*

Watching her manage got me thinking, which is why today for your consideration, the Mind-Tickler brings ow-ies instead of tickles.

Because gosh, don't we hate physical pain? What a misery.

When the body hurts, there's no question there's a Me and a whole bunch of No Thank You.

Seems only logical that we would try to eliminate pain or at least get it to some manageable level where it can be dismissed. (Hey mom, meet Mr. Morphine Button.)

And yet avoiding pain is not a given, and not the only option. Over centuries there have been countless Eastern monks, American Indians and religious visionaries who intentionally brought on torment and set about to hurt in a very big way. As in, on purpose.

What for? Why did they do this to themselves?

Turns out it was to transcend self. To attain enlightenment. Through torture.

Amazingly, vastly different geographical and cultural groups all discovered that when the body feels absolutely awful and the mind is occupied with dealing with that, the self/consciousness/spirit/ or whatever could fly free.

Could it be that pain is a way to escape the body, via the body?

Could it be that for many, physical misery is not just allowed, but actually necessary to enable to transcendence?

Meanwhile a lot of modern-day attention is given to ways to stop this experience. There's ibuprofen and mindfulness so we don't hurt, macrobiotic diets so we don't ache, and opioids, weeds, and alcohol so we don't notice any of it.

And yet a lot of the Mind-Tickler's readers are also striving and working earnestly and with dedication in hopes of some glimmer of enlightenment.

So, when it comes to pain, what if we could know that the distress so strenuously being avoided was actually a direct way to transcendence? Would we want it gone then?

If we could consider that it might take hurting we don't want, in order to get what we do want, what might happen to the experience of that pain?

Of course I'm not saying this is easy, and not proposing that anyone rush out to induce agony like the Indians. And of course anyone in pain can certainly be forgiven for just saying, "Pass the morphine, Doc". Much like my mom, who's happily hallucinating puppies and polka-dots.

But if pain does come to call, and if there's any inclination to deal with it in a different-than-usual way,

Maybe it can be seen as an opportunity rather than a torture.

Because it could just be that like Dorothy, what we've been aching for has been here all along, right there in the aches and pains we've been so strenuously trying to make vanish.

That shift in viewpoint might change the whole experience.

And that pain may be just what helps us see the light.

WEIRD NON-DUALITY

January 18, 2018

So here's the weird thing about the non-dual scene.

Well, there are many weird things of course, but one of them is…

It's full of mythology. Mythology that persists no matter what we see, hear or learn that contradicts it.

For instance, Alan Watts: "*I have never yet met a saint or sage who did not have some human frailties*."

You realize what that quote means, right?

It means that even after enlightenment, whatever that is or isn't, however it's defined…

Life goes on. Humanness persists. Even saints and sages keep desiring, drinking, smoking, having sex, and, heaven forbid, reacting.

Of course this can be shocking to consider when so many insist that it's possible to become more than human. Although.... where does the human disappear to, Bermuda? But I digress.

In addition to being deliberately fed this dream in so many ways, we might be forgiven for wishing for perfection, simply because the story is so appealing. Most seekers are devoted to the myth of constant calm and smiles no matter what. Even though the untruth of that story has been revealed many times. (And when wise ones have supported this myth, all one needs to do is look at their personal off-stage life to see the contrast between words and deeds.)

All those teachers who say, "Chop wood, carry water?" All those sages from Buddha on up who have written some version of "Nothing changes after enlightenment?"

They mean it.

The honest ones essentially say, "Yes I have had experiences and still, life as it's been, goes on. This personality is here. I still feel things, I still think things, I'm still "me"."

Anthony de Mello: "*Before enlightenment, I used to be depressed; after enlightenment, I continue to be depressed*."

And yet, it seems we'd much prefer to think, "If I do everything right and inquire more and get more present and see through the illusion of self, I will no longer be this messed up person. I will no longer be not good enough or unlovable or a failure. I will no longer get angry. I'll only be peaceful, blissful and content at all times for ever and ever, amen."

Not that it's so terrible that people are seeking a unicorn. Except that this set up keeps us chasing and dissatisfied, forever.

Adyashanti: "*Most people think enlightenment is like an unending satori experience. But it's not an unending experience at all. It has nothing to do with an unending experience. That misunderstanding will get you to do more 'tail chasing' than you ever dreamed possible. In the end enlightenment has very little to do with enlightenment experiences. It is simply not perceiving through the lens of ego*."

I mean, yes, maybe here and there we get lucky and some overt quirk of personality shifts, so that maybe we stop drinking for example, but basically…

Whatever that personality is, remains.

That's why we don't confuse Adyashanti with Krishnamurti or Rupert. We recognize one from the other because each of their unique, identifiable personalities continues.

So the question becomes…

Assuming we're able (and willing) to see past the hope and myth of getting to something "better" … is it possible to be OK with that?

Is it possible to set aside all our dreams of a better Me, and stop chasing an idealized fantasy life?

Byron Katie: "*There is no permanent state of clarity, since clarity has no future. We don't wake up forever. We wake up only now. People have these wonderful experiences of spiritual opening, and that's not it. As soon as they think, "I want this to last forever," they've moved into a future and lost the reality. THIS is it, right now. It's that simple. Only this exists.*"

Oh I do wish this for everyone. Because trying to be MORE brings perpetual seeking, perpetual failure, perpetual self-blame, self-focus and lies.

That's a failure-ridden, misery-inducing, non-stop feeding of personal inadequacy. Not to mention a drained bank-account, crushed-dreams casualty waiting to happen.

"I'm not there yet."

Well of course you are. There is no "there," and every one of us is here. Where else can you be?

This is it. This Me. Right here. Here it is, and tag, you are already it. There's nothing more to get.

Of course we've heard and read that many times before, here in The Mind-Tickler and everywhere else.

Tony Parsons: "*The most effective way the mind AVOIDS Awakening is to SEEK it. You are already that which is. But your mind is frightened to let go and still has an idea that something special should happen.*"

But the pull of myth and dream is strong.

So if we are lucky enough to finally see this… what now?

What happens to life when it isn't chock full of improving, or watching to see what self shouldn't be doing, or constantly checking to see what is lacking?

Is it possible to live life without trying to change, attain, correct or fix?

What does it even look like when relationships hit all the triggers, when things feel utterly sad, when anxiety shows up in the night, if it's actually understood that this existence, as it is, is it?

Tim Freke: "*My life isn't always perfect; it's full of highs and lows, just as I suspect your life is. We share the same dilemmas. … I've fallen in love with my tender, vulnerable, wounded humanity, just as it is, in all its glorious ambiguity. I've fallen in love with my wonderful, terrifying, everyday life, in all its bittersweet splendour.*"

And yes, dreaming and pining for something better is also 'it", and of course be my guest. Though it does kind of suck.

But even more than the inevitable unhappiness, myth-chasing actually keeps us from what we're seeking.

Because when we simply notice that 'bettering' is going on- not as a ploy to change it, but just noticing the myth at work- something happens.

Right behind that first disbelieving response- y'know, the tantrum: "No! This can't be it! It's not ok as is! Not even close! Then what's the point? Why get out of bed? Noooooo…."

Right behind that might be, surprisingly… something else. Something that's not dependent on fixing things in order to be happy.

Something now. Something here. Something this.

Jeff Foster: "*Nothing changes [after enlightenment.] Eat, shit, grow old. Get cancer. Scream in pain in the middle of the night. None of that stops. This isn't about living in some New Age fantasy world. This isn't about*

taking on comforting concepts. This is reality at its most raw. Nothing can be blocked out anymore. It's the end of control. It's a love affair with what is."

That's a not-mythological presence which, astonishingly, might just be what we've been chasing all along.

Here already.

Just like they've been saying.

ANGRRRR

January 23, 2018

Want to play Poke the Tiger? Let's toy with annoyance, anger, and irritation.

We can start by saying straight up...most of us are pretty sure anger is bad. Even when it feels good or we think it's necessary, like for example when we're talking to the cable company or hollering at some deserving elected official, there's still often an uneasy background guilt for having lost our temper.

Anger is generally accepted to indicate lack of control, flawed character, and lack of personal evolution.

Which is why people have been trying to gain the upper hand over anger since we lived in caves. We've tried to understand it, find the cause, meditate, medicate, allow and eliminate it.

'Course we're the same silly humans that think we can control circumstances and that if we just play things right, bad situations won't ever happen and all will be well. And naturally any resulting happiness will be all down to our good moves and choices.

Oh the power! Yay us!

And then existence giggles and says, "Aw honey, have some Listeria with that kale, a little nail for that tire, a layoff, a hole in that wallet pocket."

Existence is very clear who the real boss is.

It ain't us.

Which of course pisses us off.

So much for having control over anger.

What does become very clear if we're paying attention (which is almost never), is that all anger, all irritation, is a result of being forced to see that we're powerless.

Any circumstance or person, every circumstance or person, that causes us to see our powerlessness is going to make us angry.

We think, "I am the boss of my life. I'll get up out of this chair without smashing my knee, having a heart attack, stubbing my toe. I'll drive in my own lane, say no to the extra serving of food, get the flu shot, go to bed early, be nice to my boss. All will be well. I will be master of my world."

And then some fool swerves into our lane, we lie awake for hours, get sick anyway. Dinner reservations vanish, the kids ignore us, the wrong political candidate wins, the parking attendant scratches the car, the dog barks, bites or pees or maybe all three at once, family treats us like idiots, spouses cheat, and... etc etc etc.

We are powerless all the time.

Which means there's no lack of occasions to get a good irritation on.

Of course generally we go on happily pretending we're in charge anyway. That pretense only carries us so far though, because life continually puts our impotence right in our faces regularly. It can't be pretended away.

We hate that. It makes us mad.

So the question becomes, what would the same irking situations in our lives be like if it was possible to see... "Oh, this is one of those situations where I'm forced to see my powerlessness?"

We might notice that as soon as we acknowledge our lack of control, those very same situations became far less infuriating.

That's because resisting the truth of our lack of power actually makes us angrier, and acknowledging it is calming.

This is different from suggesting, "Accept the situation," although life might well be easier if that were more possible. But acceptance is not always easy, and frankly in some situations we don't even want to try.

Instead we could simply notice that we are powerless in those situations, that life is exerting its will not ours, and then sit back and watch what happens.

Things might shift; anger might relax. Even with the cable company. Just by noticing our lack of authority and the fear of that lack.

Besides, when we're not the boss, then life is running the show, which means we don't have to. Whatever happens is no longer our fault. Then there's no need for self punishment when things don't go the way it seems they should.

When the smoothness of existence no longer depends on little ol' us, we become far less important.

That can be a huge relief.

And sure, people can still try to have control. But when it's seen how much frustration, failure, shame and guilt comes along with that attempt, well who would want that?

So... powerless? Yes please. Lack of control or significance? Ahh.

We can let existence do its thing, go for the ride, enjoy the vacation.

Maybe even pet that big ol' kitty instead of poking it.

YOU BELIEVE THAT?

January 30, 2018

We're obsessed.

By what?

By belief. Point of view. Opinion. "Truth."

Humans are laser-focused on figuring out what we believe and then defending it, fighting for it, and of course getting furious with others for believing something different.

Whether choosing a religion, a political side, knowing what we shouldn't do, or dealing with anyone else- family members, children, spouses, coworkers, bosses, strangers in the street…

A whole lot of lifetime is taken up with determining what is believed and whether things are true.

I mean, there's even an Inquiry devoted to that preoccupation. As many lovely Mind-Tickler readers know. And believe in. And get protective about.

"Dammit Judy, don't be asking me to question my treasured point of view about questioning points of view."

Yup. Obsessed.

In fact, try and not get wrapped up in what is believed in any given situation. See if that's even possible.

Which is odd. I mean, why care so dang much about beliefs? Why spend so much life figuring out our version of things? What's the benefit, the need,

the big satisfaction in knowing Truth?

After all they're just beliefs, right? They're not real things. They're not even air.

Well, that might be a clue to tracking this infatuation down. Because when we start to notice how ferociously we hang on to concepts-- to not-real things- we begin to see the idea that we have the power to DO things. "Oh look, I can understand, I can change things, I can surround myself only with like-minded others! Look at me with all this power."

Yay! This is good. Much better than being powerless and not knowing, both of which are, after all, yucky.

Plus, to think that we know The Truth feels like we're important, significant. A seemingly lovely benefit.

Although… "important and significant" are positions, just as points of view are positions. And positions locate…

Oh.

Me. Points of view position Me.

Beliefs create the sense that there is a separate and distinct Me. After all, "I am the one thinking, noticing and evaluating thoughts. I am the one who hates that political figure, believes this religion, wants awakening, prefers peace, knows getting angry is wrong. I am, therefore, here."

No wonder we fight so hard for it. Figuring out and protecting what we believe- about anything, about everything- solidifies the sense of self.

'Course there is no peace in that. We like to act as if there is, but no- this is what all war is made of. And just by feeling into that focus on truth and rightness, we can sense the thoughts-machine getting busy, stirring things up. Nothing wrong with being stirred-up, except that it might be the opposite of the satisfaction supposed to come from firmly held beliefs.

So, could it be possible we're missing something while constantly obsessing on our Position? Could it be there's a way of experiencing that doesn't make us the center of everything?

Well, let's experiment. No harm in playing a bit, right?

What if, instead of insisting on the usual, "I am the one who is right here being right", we were able to just play with, "I am this belief itself?"

Of course this might seem weird or dumb when we've been taken over by belief for so long. Still…

What if what we are – literally- is thought itself?

What happens when we consider that we are the words, "Is it true," and "This is stupid," and every thought, every feeling, image, color and sound that comes after that and after that and after that?

Then it doesn't matter what's true, or what is believed, does it? "I believe this," becomes irrelevant when we are that and every other thought.

This might change everything.

In fact, consider that we're not THE ONE evaluating, but the evaluation itself and…

Notice how quiet mind suddenly goes?

Huh.

When we really feel into BEING thought itself, we kind of… disappear.

Of course this little experiment is not about substituting one belief for another, or evaluating whether The Mind-Tickler is right about anything. It's just a different way of experiencing, setting all the figuring-out to the side for a bit.

We can just play with coming back to BEING each of those thoughts rolling through, each of those feelings happening.

And then see what happens.

"Man is made by his belief. As he believes, so he is."

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

NORMAL: JUST A SETTING ON THE BLAH BLAH BLAH

March 13, 2018

When it comes to being normal, most folks are very confused.

On the one hand, whatever normal is, we want it, need it, gotta have it. We wear clothes in public, fret if we're dressed "inappropriately," do our best to make a living, have a place to live, and keep quiet so people will allow us to join them in getting high on too much pie at Christmas.

We reeeeally want to fit in somewhere, blend with some group or other, belong while not being incarcerated or institutionalized.

Basically as long as we're not too weird, we're for it.

Except…. we don't want too much normal.

Too normal is sheep-like, boring, unthinking, one of the crowd. Insignificant, even.

Yeah, no thanks. We'd much rather be special. Don't be part of the herd! Be the star, shave the head, get the tattoos, be the best, cutest, smartest or most enlightened in the room.

Except… not too much different either, please. Not drooling, screaming, setting-things-on-fire, "OMG she's crazy" different.

See the confusion?

Which is it? Do we want normal or special, same or different? Same, but not too much same? Stand out but not too much out?

Yes!

See? That clears things right up.

If we're paying attention, we might start to notice all the effort to walk the middle line and not veer too much in either direction.

Which is another way of saying "normal."

Of course this involves careful navigation. Because while no one wants to be insignificant, no one wants to be so significant that they're alone either.

Because, well, … alone. We hate it. Alone is bad, 'nkay?

We'd much rather be part of the greater cluster than a lone nut.

So here we are, working lifetimes to nurture individuality, while hating being alone, hating being separate, hating being disconnected.

As if, as individuals, we've detached from the whole and spun off into space to die alone, when all we really wanted all along was to be invited to the cosmic party.

It turns out that much more than specialness, what we really crave is completeness, inclusion, lack of separation.

We long to disappear into something greater than little ol' Me.

Striving for normal is just our mixed-up way of trying to eliminate the sense of separation between our Self and the bigger picture.

Although it's kind of funny. Because how is it possible to exist and not be in the picture?

We keep trying to get back to what we really are.

As if it's possible to have left that in the first place, and now have to work hard to return.

Meanwhile, with the constant focus on how to make the individual stand out- focusing on what it wants, what it likes, what it feels, how it's doing-well…

We might not notice what we're already part of, when all our attention is on trying to be distinctly not part-of.

Trying to make the individual more individual is fruitless. And not peaceful. And not possible. And causes us to miss the "No me, only we" essence of existence.

I mean, imagine watching this planet's ebbs and flows from far out in space, and see if any one individual is separate and disconnected from the whole. See if, with perspective, it's possible to find where one person ends and another begins, or if it all moves as a cohesive unit.

This is good news. Turns out we are already part of a larger completeness. There's no need to work so hard for connectedness that's already here.

The individual isn't so individual after all. No matter how special and unique, or nutty and seemingly alone, we're still part of something so much bigger.

And we can't get more normal than "Everything."

That's the epitome of normal.

It's as included as an individual can get.

Yay! Party in the cosmos!

We're In.

ENOUGH!

March 20, 2018

So much in life isn't enough.

Love money kids talent success quiet peace safety power. Oh and happiness. Oh and enlightenment.

More please.

And of course there's always the ME- that epitome of not enough-ness. Not kind enough, productive enough, lovable enough, successful enough. Perfect life? Not grateful enough.

And then there's that old favorite, the just plain, "Not good enough."

Amazing the number of people who lack in enough goodness. As if existence was too stupid to include more good while doling out those billions of lives. Yup, silly ol' existence, just another not-good-enough screw up.

Even those things that seem like too much are actually just the flip side of not enough. Too many bills equals not enough money, too much quiet equals not enough adventure, too much success means not enough time smelling the flowers.

Yearn for more, then get it and it's too much. Pine for a vacation with unstructured time and then be bored with all that downtime.

We yearn to feel good, to be happy, to be enlightened. Thought says that's all we need- to get what we yearn for. Then we'll be happy. Surely more contentment will make us satisfied.

But what happens to feeling good as soon as that yearning for more, happens?

Buh-bye.

So whatever glimmers of contentment we do score are short lived. Because then we want to know how to keep it, forever. And how to get more.

Never enough enough for the mind. No matter how much there is.

We might have to get used to that.

Because the human mind is not able of grasping this enough thing.

We're always mildly discontent with this life, and if not, we're discontent with contentment.

Pretty wacky, huh.

So what can be done to fix this?

Nothing.

Nothing can be done about not enough contentment.

Because enough can't come from striving. That just creates dissatisfaction with What Is, which in turn creates unhappiness, disheartening and depression.

When we think about it, trying to fix discontent and get happy is really a perfect task for the mind. Because it never reaches the finish line, trying to fix the unfixable.

Luckily we don't have to stop wanting (as if we could.) And we can't bully mind into acceptance.

All we can do is watch the game.

And yet that- paradoxically, nonsensically- might just bring the taste of awakeness we're yearning for.

Because somehow it changes things to see that all satisfaction is temporary, and that discontent is always going to be an ongoing part of the being-human game.

Paradoxically, it helps to see that contentment can only come from seeing that...

it's never going to come.

Happiness can only come from being good with happiness never coming.

Now of course I realize that this zen koan-y-type stuff may at first seem to not make much sense. But that's the beauty of paradox- it illustrates the limitations of mind trying to grasp itself. That's a pretty valuable tidbit in itself.

And of course I also know this is different from the, "You can do it! Get on out there and start to fixing!" stuff you've heard from so many others out there. But if those approaches haven't been working for you, could be there's a reason.

Luckily we don't have to make sense of this, or find a way to be grateful or accepting or satisfied or happy- or any of that stuff we don't know how to do anyway and would have done a long time ago if only we did know how.

Rather than try so darn hard to get happier, maybe we can just expect discontentment, expect not-enough-ness, expect dissatisfaction.

And then watch what happens.

Imagine the peace that might be felt if we really could be free of the need to fix or have enough... anything.

That just might leave us here in the present, living with and accepting What Is.

Which is what we're after anyway, isn't it?

And that just might be...

Every once in a while and however briefly...

Enough.

COMMON WISDOM VS ENLIGHTENMENT

April 3, 2018

So much in life isn't enough.

Love money kids talent success quiet peace safety power. Oh and happiness. Oh and enlightenment.

More please.

And of course there's always the ME- that epitome of not enough-ness. Not kind enough, productive enough, lovable enough, successful enough. Perfect life? Not grateful enough.

And then there's that old favorite, the just plain, "Not good enough."

Amazing the number of people who lack in enough goodness. As if existence was too stupid to include more good while doling out those billions of lives. Yup, silly ol' existence, just another not-good-enough screw up.

Even those things that seem like too much are actually just the flip side of not enough. Too many bills equals not enough money, too much quiet equals not enough adventure, too much success means not enough time smelling the flowers.

Yearn for more, then get it and it's too much. Pine for a vacation with unstructured time and then be bored with all that downtime.

We yearn to feel good, to be happy, to be enlightened. Thought says that's all we need- to get what we yearn for. Then we'll be happy. Surely more contentment will make us satisfied.

But what happens to feeling good as soon as that yearning for more, happens?

Buh-bye.

So whatever glimmers of contentment we do score are short lived. Because then we want to know how to keep it, forever. And how to get more.

Never enough enough for the mind. No matter how much there is.

We might have to get used to that.

Because the human mind is not able of grasping this enough thing.

We're always mildly discontent with this life, and if not, we're discontent with contentment.

Pretty wacky, huh.

So what can be done to fix this?

Nothing.

Nothing can be done about not enough contentment.

Because enough can't come from striving. That just creates dissatisfaction with What Is, which in turn creates unhappiness, disheartening and depression.

When we think about it, trying to fix discontent and get happy is really a perfect task for the mind. Because it never reaches the finish line, trying to fix the unfixable.

Luckily we don't have to stop wanting (as if we could.) And we can't bully mind into acceptance.

All we can do is watch the game.

And yet that- paradoxically, nonsensically- might just bring the taste of awakeness we're yearning for.

Because somehow it changes things to see that all satisfaction is temporary, and that discontent is always going to be an ongoing part of the being-human game.

Paradoxically, it helps to see that contentment can only come from seeing that...

it's never going to come.

Happiness can only come from being good with happiness never coming.

Now of course I realize that this zen koan-y-type stuff may at first seem to not make much sense. But that's the beauty of paradox- it illustrates the limitations of mind trying to grasp itself. That's a pretty valuable tidbit in itself.

And of course I also know this is different from the, "You can do it! Get on out there and start to fixing!" stuff you've heard from so many others out there. But if those approaches haven't been working for you, could be there's a reason.

Luckily we don't have to make sense of this, or find a way to be grateful or accepting or satisfied or happy- or any of that stuff we don't know how to do anyway and would have done a long time ago if only we did know how.

Rather than try so darn hard to get happier, maybe we can just expect discontentment, expect not-enough-ness, expect dissatisfaction.

And then watch what happens.

Imagine the peace that might be felt if we really could be free of the need to fix or have enough... anything.

That just might leave us here in the present, living with and accepting What Is.

Which is what we're after anyway, isn't it?

And that just might be...

Every once in a while and however briefly...

Enough.

DRAMA DRUNK

April 17, 2018

Existence is kind to every one of us. Even you.

Wait, give me a moment to duck.

Because most likely mind wants to argue the crap out of that first sentence. Maybe even beat me up a little for it.

"No way, Judy!" you may be saying. "I don't know what privileged life you lead, but life is not kind to me. I suffer. Look at this pain. Look at this depression, look at this trauma, failure, loneliness, lack of money. What about all the times I've been stabbed in the back, what about all the treachery and evil of others in my life?

And what about all those poor people in Syria and the people shot in their own back yards and the people with cancer? You call that "good life?" You're smoking something."

Now hang on a minute. If you're going to go there, don't leave out my favorite outrage, the time-honored, "You're not validating my pain!"

Because despite the near-constant attention we give suffering- sitting with it, feeling it, embodying it, speaking with it- it's never enough. We've apparently also gotta have "validation" (whatever that is) from other folks whose pain is, naturally, nothing compared to ours.

Such a drama queen, the mind.

Annnyyyway…

With all that going on, thought can devotedly focus on all the miseries, and happily ignore all the countless hours- years really- of non-miseries.

Because yes, no matter what thought says, non-trauma is indeed here. In fact, the vast percentage of life is and has been non-hurting.

No need to take my word for it. Think about your own life- including time spent sleeping and cutting toenails and rocking babies and chopping vegetables and folding laundry. Add in the times you laughed, were in love (even if only briefly), put on pants, smelled spring in the air. Then look at the total percentage of life that is not painful.

What percentage would you give it- 50%? 80%?

Even if it's 20%, does that non-misery time not count at all?

I mean, it's what you want, right?

Besides, if pain needs validation, then not-pain should also need validation.

Or is only misery worthy of acknowledgement?

Oh silly humans, finding non-pain completely uninteresting even though it's what we claim to want.

Kind of crazy, yet also understandable. Because mind needs a problem, something to think about, something to solve.

That means any situation or feeling that doesn't need solving is quickly dismissed. Non-problem? Not interesting.

Plus, we get high on suffering. Not high as in, "Wheee!" but still souped up, marinated in the adrenaline and other body chemicals induced by drama.

Admitted or not, humans are full-on addicted to emotionality. So when necessary, we'll drum up whatever "This is not ok!" problem will do the job to keep the juice going.

We are completely used to that chemical soup. We miss it big time when it isn't there.

We call that "empty, bored, unmotivated."

We want our hit. And only drama can deliver that. The mind can't get drunk on peace.

Which explains the perpetual yearning for okness while pointedly ignoring whatever percentage of it is already here.

And which also explains how we don't notice that life is indeed good even when there's pain going on.

Because when you think about it, everyone has experienced times where what felt like the end of the world at the time turned out later to have been, in hindsight, a blessing. Though of course we sobbed, hated, and cursed throughout.

So yes humans focus on misery, and yes we insistently ignore the amazingness of breath, air, gravity, skin, lilacs, internal organs, and puppies and yes we hurt hurt hurt.

And even so, when we can notice the actual instead of our demands, preferences, expectations and shoulds, we discover that the present is... good enough. As it is. Without solutions, without fix-its.

Even those who are apparently in extreme situations find this okness, when they aren't sucked into and blinded by drama soup.

Existence is good. In actuality. In this moment. For us all, including you.

And when we're willing to pay attention to anything more than misery for even a moment, what's been here all along becomes quite clear.

Acknowledged or not, peace is right here, relief is right is here, okness is right here, goodness is right here.

It's what we say we want.

Here it is.

Right here.

Right now.

And now.

And now.

And now.

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE

April 24, 2018

Recently, a friend's parents died within 2 weeks of each other. Another friend is angry because she doesn't feel heard. Another struggles with health and physical pain. One's husband is cheating with a co-worker. One doesn't know where he's going to find money for rent.

Life.

It appears to be happening. To us. No matter what the experience, what the pain or fear or circumstance, we seem to be the center point, the common denominator, the one it's all about.

Despite all those pictures of galaxies and "You are here"s, and despite the never-ending stream of non-dual quotes saying we're just not that important and that we are, in fact, nothing…

We are still pretty gosh-darn certain we are something, in fact, the main thing. Milky Way or not.

And while of course a case can be made that we're nothing, and in fact the Mind-Tickler has made that case right here many times…

Still…

The feeling that it's all about ME is very very strong.

So there's no harm in exploring if it's possible we've been right about this in some way.

I mean, what exactly is there, without little ol' us?

What colors exist without eyes to see it? What sensations are there without fingertips and nerve-endings? What sounds exist without ears?

Really what's left without us?

After all, consciousness needs something to be conscious of. And it needs hardware to do that - it needs eyes, ears, nose etc.

Without that hardware, there'd be nothing.

We happen to bring all that to the table.

So regardless of whether we think we're specifically at the center of things, the one to whom things are happening, and regardless of whether the pain, yearning and not-enoughness that comes with being an individual feels very personal...

Experience- color, sound, smell, sensation- happens. No matter what thoughts or perspective tag along with it.

So what if we were somehow able to set aside that centralized point of view for just a moment, and consider the possibility that we are experience itself, rather than the one it happens to, or rather than the one who witnesses? What if we could remove all that personal ME-centered-ness completely and look again?

Well then…

Holy cow…

We're IT.

We're experience itself. Literally the fulcrum in which everything happens.

The line between us and what happens? Nonexistent.

The deaths, tears, pains, cheating husbands, money fears? We're all of that.

We're the universe, existence, every color, shape, sound, feeling, thought.

Not in a life, or having a life, or experiencing a life, thinking about a life, witnessing a life...

But actual life itself. We're all of it. God. The universe. Everything.

There's only one thing. That thing is us.

We're a requirement.

Can't get more important than that.

See? We knew it!

Ok sure, we may not be in one locatable place, but being everything everywhere is still kind of OK, isn't it?

I mean, talk about special. Talk about mattering.

Look at us.

Wow.

SEEKING SEEKING

May 1, 2018

Lots of Mind-Tickler readers are seekers of one sort or another.

Whether the hunt is for enlightenment, love, kindness, success or just to feel better, many folks are out there chasing something better, something righter.

Even though all those quotes, books, teachers and sages out there say, "What you're seeking is already here."

Don't you love that?

Yeah perhaps not.

Because when you're hurting or dissatisfied, the idea that non-seeking is "better" seems to belittle the pervasive sense that things just aren't right. Which can then add a sense of failure in this spiritual game. Which can then even make you angry or despondent and inclined to say, "Screw this."

So what are they talking about? I mean, peace, enlightenment, better feelings, better situations… let's face it, none of that seems to be here. Or at least not as much or as frequently as you've been told they're supposed to be.

So naturally you want something else. More enlightenment. More peace. Less suffering. Better everything, please.

Certainly not this.

Seeking seems absolutely necessary.

There's a ton of obvious wrongness. And it's not like that's a breeze to fix. The betterment being sought- awakening, improvement of life, feelings, self

and others- well, it's exhausting and never-ending trying to find it.

After all, where does "better" hang out? Is it sitting on a shelf somewhere, on the chairs in satsang, in some head waiting patiently? Can it be scored by behaving just so, or by embodying, sitting with, solving, inquiring? Maybe all it takes is another political leader, another body at the dining table, more paper in a wallet. Or maybe different sensations in a solar plexus might take care of it all?

Aw hell. How are you supposed to get some "better" if you don't know where it is?

Sheesh, what a screw-up existence is. After millennia producing these life forms, shouldn't it have learned the error of its ways and fixed this mess?

Stupid existence.

Ok so, that can't be right, can it? So let's consider…. maybe we have missed something.

Let's imagine for a moment that there's thick unmovable mud up to our ankles. We look down, see the mud, start figuring out how the mud got there, what caused it, how we feel about it, how to tolerate it, how to make it less immovable, how to make it go away, how to secure the future so there's never any mud ever again. We envision all the possible consequences that will surely happen if this mud thing isn't figured out pronto.

With all that dedicated focus, mud is going to seem like the only thing that matters. I mean who's going to bother paying attention to where there is no mud- that area from the ankles up- when there's this serious issue at hand?

Although isn't that exactly what we're seeking with all that solution-finding? A non-mud experience?

There it is, above the ankles.

And now, substitute the word "pain" for "mud" and it gets clearer that when one focuses on pain, non-pain (non-mud) is ignored. So life feels like constant unrelenting suffering. It feels impossible to notice the vast amount of self and life and experience which is not hurting and fine, when pain is all that is seen.

Even though tons of non-pain is happening.

So the sages may have been right.

Because whether we're seeking enlightenment or consciousness or the end of suffering, sadness, or anger…

It could be that the, "You already are what you seek" stuff is just a matter of attention. Attention to the above-the-ankles-totally-fine experience that's already here, instead of only to below-the-ankles wrongness.

Because if we are able to know what we feel, then consciousness is already present and awake to us (whatever ‘us' is) and therefore doesn't need to be sought. If we are able to seek peace, then peace must be already present in order to provide the room to do that seeking, and therefore doesn't need to be sought. If we are able to seek consciousness, then consciousness must already be present in order to do that seeking, and therefore doesn't need to be sought.

No need to seek what's here already.

Y'know, because… here. Already.

This is great news. After all, it's a whole lot less work to notice the non-mud, non-pain that's already here than it is to figure out how to create a non-mud existence from scratch.

Like we were god or existence or something.

Now, this is not suggesting to not feel pain, or to ignore pain, or to "sit with" pain. This is an invitation to consider the possibility that…

We are capable of noticing the "part" of us that is ok whether pain is here or not.

We are capable of noticing that even when we hurt, we are also ok, also awake, also conscious and consciousness.

Even when we think we're not.

We are the human having an experience, the awareness of the experience, AND the experience itself.

Which means there's nothing to seek. That which we've been seeking- we are all of it. Always have been.

We just didn't realize.

And of course, seeking is as good an experience as any other too.

Which leaves us with nowhere else to go, nothing else to chase.

Nothing to seek.

Not even the end of seeking.

OUT OF THE FOG

May 15, 2018

Many years ago I had a young friend who was driving on the highway, arguing with his wife. He pulled over to the side of the road to check on something in his trunk, still arguing all the while. She got out of the car to join him so she could continue the "discussion." And there on the road shoulder, a passing truck hit her and killed her.

Instantly whatever they were arguing about suddenly made absolutely no difference to him at all.

Instantly my friend snapped out of his anger at her, as if he had been driving through a fog and then suddenly came out into the clear day.

And of course once out of his fog he remembered how much he loved her. He was devastated, agonizingly guilty, full of regret.

Like my friend's anger before that truck so painfully and immediately sobered him up, all of us experience a similar fog in the various situations life brings. For most folks, there's a caught-up-in-things sense that whatever is happening to us is ...

Important.

Whether it's big circumstances like death, losing a home to fire, kids taken away, addictions, or whether it's all those countless everyday shouldn't-matter-but-do irritations, humiliations, giggles, tears, pains, loves...

We experience everything as if it matters.

Situations appear to matter. What we think appears to matter. What we feel appears to matter. Every single thing that happens or doesn't happen to us

seems to matter.

From our myopic point of view, it is all important, all consuming, all absorbing.

Importance shrouds everything in fog.

Naturally this doesn't feel great.

And though that not-great feeling is also mist, still we might be forgiven for yearning to feel better, or for seeking a clearer experience of life.

Which is why today The Tickler offers the following little mind-game to play. Just for a possible brief break from the clouds.

Starting with the seemingly innocuous question, "Do I want peace?"

"Well of course," the mind instantly says without considering. "Duh."

But... truly? As in, at any cost, any loss of rightness, identity, certainty?

Because all of that stuff maintains fog. There can be no light of day with any of that.

And then we might ask, "Is it possible to find peace right here right now, in these exact circumstances, just as they are?" Even if it feels like there's something very important going on?

We're just asking if it's possible.

Is it?

If so, and if we're really willing to shed the mist, maybe we can move out of the limitations of mattering...

And just for a little while...

Go bigger.

Whether we call it consciousness or awareness or God or The Universe, we can play with moving attention out from the human drama, to whatever it is that's bigger.

See if "biggerness" holds humans to the same standards that thought does. See if that infuriating political opponent, that scornful person on Facebook, that minus sign on the bank statement, that empty chair across the dinner table, matters from a bigger non-human point of view.

See if whatever is happening is important, from that bigger place.

See if existence requires different experiences, feelings, thoughts.

Might we discover an acceptance of whatever is happening, when we're not steeped in a blinders-on viewpoint?

Mind-Tickler readers desiring enlightenment might notice the limitations of these small human viewpoints.

Because when we focus on the small, we necessarily miss the big.

Now of course these are just simple questions, nothing complicated, wordy or full of jargony spiritual discourse. No hours of inquiry, meditation or discipline needed.

And who knows? It could turn out that a perspective shift is all it takes to break the spell of thought for a moment.

Because in the end, that's all the fog is anyway. A momentary point of view.

Which is lucky. Because that's much easier to shift than any actual situation.

And might be all we need to avoid the speeding truck.

Not because it's necessary. But it does feel better.

And no matter what circumstances come down the road, there's no rule that says we must suffer, here in this brief existence.

AN INSIDE JOB

June 5, 2018

Somewhere deep inside us, in there along with the blood and muscles and nerves- is a cave-like closet.

Thoughts are stored in there, as well as a body-less voice spoken by no one which spews mean unwelcome chatter all day long. Peace is in there too, along with Answers.

Lower down there's a second closet or an extension of the higher one, where feelings are stashed. Apparently they're trapped and need help getting out.

It's all very rich and dark and potent. Kind of like a tropical jungle, but indoors.

You know what else is in there? The past. Stealthily running lives, determining what happens everywhere, lying in wait from childhood on to spring forth its demons at all kinds of inconvenient times forever and ever into the future.

Yup. One hell of a closet.

Everyone knows this and agrees it's important to turn inward, go deep, do inner work.

We just have to be an intrepid adventurer to go on in there, and we'll find that closet.

No boat or map or GPS needed. Just ask and answer some questions, visualize, say "Om" a lot, or pray.

Ready? Let's go.

When we do find the closet, inside we'll find "the Real Me." It lives in there, chilling in the dark, listening to the voice, watching the movies, waiting to be found and validated and seen.

Meanwhile, something that is NOT the Real Me knows about this inner place, makes the trip inside, hears the voice.

That traveller-to-the-inside is also called ‘Me'.

Wait, there are two of them? Which is the Real and which isn't?

Oh well, never mind. Onward.

Somehow the inner one creates the outer world, outside the closet.

Yet it's the outside one that has the power to look for, uncover, unlock, examine, shift, transform and/or free the Real Thing that's stored inside there.

Ok. So um….

What?

This is a whole bunch of fantastical magic we've been accepting without question all these years, isn't it?

This concept of "going inward" makes zero sense.

Not that there's anything wrong with believing fairy stories. But clever Mind-Tickler readers have perhaps already noticed all the preoccupation, time, money, inquiry, therapy, satsang and meditation that has been devoted to looking for something…

that isn't located where we're looking.

And yes perhaps we do get to feel like we're doing something useful, and that we have control over something. And yes the sense of Me is strong

when we pretend it has an inside- one we can access whenever we want, or when we do things just right.

Still, if the whole point of going inward is to discover the real, to discover the truth, to shift or enlighten…

We're not going to find what we claim to want.

Because fantasy, however engaging, is still fantasy. Fantasy will never be Real. Fiction is fiction.

So… want enlightenment? It's not inside.

Want inner peace? Not in there either.

The real me? Nope.

Because there is no inside.

There's no there there.

That inside job is not inside, not a job, and just plain isn't.

Whew. Suddenly so much free time.

And who knows? When we're not looking in the wrong direction, we might be more able to notice an already-present vastness, an inconceivable spaciousness…

which could never be contained or trapped by some small, conceived... inside.

Whoa.

Isn't that what we were looking for all along?

Oh look.

Here it is.

TALE OF THE TALE

June 12, 2018

Stories. We love ‘em.

We like them big. Big feelings, big transformations, big come-uppances. Larger than life? (interesting expression.) Yes please.

Love! Pain! Royals! Trump!

Drama is greatly preferred but boring will do if necessary. It's not required to like the story, or even to be entertained. Subject matter? Irrelevant. We'll tell a tale about anything. ("The water is grey today.")

Humans narrate life.

Watching, symbolizing, evaluating, chronicling.

All. The. Time.

"I am feeling anxious. She shouldn't have said that. He was angry and depressed. I need more money. The umbrella is gone. This pain is terrible-it's like an elephant inside. I'm in love. The sky is blue."

These are descriptions of experience, a constant masking narration, putting up a separating layer between us and existence.

Turns out we are much less interested in living than in describing living.

No other creatures do this. Other species just are. Is-ness happening.

Which, funny enough, is an unembellished presence that many enlightenment seekers happen to aspire to.

So then why not drop the requisite telling of how we feel, who we are, what we think, and if we're getting anywhere?

Nah, most humans are going to hold tight to narration as if our lives depended on it.

Which, maybe they do.

After all, what exactly would be left if it was possible for the constant story-telling to fall away?

There's be no tale of Me, no experiencer, no evaluation of like-not-like, or good-bad, right-wrong, or "who I am." There's be no identity, meaning, or symbols. There's be no analysis, talking about, thinking about.

Yeah, no thanks.

Give us TV, movies, computer, Facebook, let us delve compulsively into people's lives including our own, let us try to fix things via inquiry, therapy, and medication. Hey maybe we'll find enlightenment via talking ourselves through meditation, thank you very much.

Being without the narrative sounds sooo unappealing.

Because there can't be a sense of Self without story.

Even the word "myself" is description.

There can't be a way to know where experience ends and Me begins, unless there is constant metaphoring.

Description creates fantasy while masquerading as reality, provides certainty and a sense of Me-ness that separates absolutely everything.

And it feels like an absolute given.

Most folks are not likely to give that up.

Even though without story, it's a helluva lot quieter.

A whole bunch of crazy goes instantly poof. Including the sense of Self.

Still… probably not.

Which is fine of course.

Even so, every once in a while…

Maybe experiencing without chronicling will happen anyway.

Maybe the ABOUT overlay will occasionally be noticed. Maybe the storied presence that so many people work so hard for will be noticed to be here already.

Maybe once in a while…

Who knows. Who can know. Who will report.

Is-ness.

Happily ever after.

The end.

GOT ENOUGH?

June 19, 2018

Oh look, a donut!

'Course, donuts come with holes.

Uh oh. Emptiness alert! Incompleteness! Lack!

We all know emptiness is bad. Emptiness is deficiency. Emptiness is missing out.

We don't want no stinkin' emptiness.

Oh my. Better take action. Better get some donut-holes too.

Yep. Fill that space up to the enough-ness line.

And now, suppose we're not talking about donuts. Suppose we're talking about you.

I mean, look at you. You obviously are not enough as is. You obviously need more money or love or health, beauty, youth, safety, control, happiness, peace.

Ugh.

Void, anyone?

Maybe order up some calm, some bliss, some enlightenment while you're at it.

Although... that enlightenment stuff can be tricky, since it is supposed to come with void encouragement rather than void filler. Which does

complicate things and make the whole subject kind of scary. I mean, encourage the void? Yikes.

Still, it's OK. Because the list of stuff you need more-of can go on and on and on. So just go for all of it. That should fill 'er up.

The thing is, if you did finally fill in all the holes and attain "enough," what would that even look like?

Well shoot, how would any of us know?

I mean it's not like we can trust thought here. After all, when was the last time thought said, "OK yeah, I have enough money now. I have enough control. I have enough enlightenment, calm, happiness. I can rest now?"

That answer would probably be, "Never."

Mind routinely rejects the enough it has, while searching for more enough elsewhere.

And since there's always something more to get, enough-ness never really shows up. Though even if it did, it wouldn't matter.

Because we're paying attention exclusively to the hole, and missing the whole.

So I wonder what would happen if we were able to play with shifting that attention.

Instead of trying to figure out what's missing and how to fix that…

What if we could feel into "Whatever it is that we really are" (not getting sidetracked by figuring out or naming that right now)…

And what if we could ask, "Is What-I-really-am lacking connectedness, from itself or anything else? In fact is it lacking anything at all?"

Perhaps we might be able to see that it's... Everything.

Huh.

Everything can't be disconnected. Everything can't be insufficient.

Y'know, because it's everything.

So while the individual, in its constant attempts at completeness, yearns so much to connect to the vast enough-ness…

And while the personality yearns so much to have more, get more, BE more,

It turns out we're already the everything donut, not the separated and empty hole.

Here we are, pining so hard, trying so hard, to be what we already are.

Complete. Sufficient. Connected.

Not to mention yummy.

All along. Realized or not.

And that is so much more than…

Enough.

WANT CONTROL?

June 26, 2018

Want more control over things?

Yes please!

Oh we really want control. Can't get enough, actually.

In fact, "out of control" is considered a bad thing. No control? No thanks.

We want to be the boss of health and money and the future. We want to manage what happens to our kids and to old folks and to property, countries, the planet. We want to rule death and thoughts and desires and enlightenment and feelings and even how deeply breath goes in and out of bodies.

We want to boss existence around.

Little ol' us.

Sounds fun, right?

So what are the odds of success at this important responsibility?

Well considering the evidence, not too high. We don't have anywhere near the kind of upper hand we want. I mean, even small bags of cookies have been known to dominate all-powerful us.

Luckily the desire for control might be worth a re-think anyway. Because what's so great about being in charge?

The story usually told is that having control makes us feel better. When actually it's the opposite.

Running the show is a fault-finding, blame inducing, failure-promising nightmare.

Try to control farts, burps, sleep and bodily functions- hello shame, addiction and frustration. Try to control the boss's or clients' opinions and choices- hello fear and inauthenticity. Try to control politics- hello fury, helplessness and despair. Try to control feelings, wants and thoughts- hello regret, guilt, and self hatred.

Oh boy.

Besides, if we were able to score the control we try so hard for, then guess whose fault it would be when things didn't go right? Guess who blew it?

Yep we're looking at you.

Ack.

Now of course no one ever has to stop trying to be in charge. No one ever has to stop trying to attain, or stop taking responsibility, or stop resisting what is.

But if it starts to feel like there's more anger, guilt, shame, depression or failure than might be wanted, it could just be because we're trying to take on jobs that aren't ours.

And I don't know why anyone would want to do that.

Because whatever does run things, whatever it is that sends hurricanes, unwanted reactions, sleeplessness, flu and empty bank accounts, apparently has its own ideas of what should or shouldn't happen on this planet.

And maybe, just maybe, it knows more than we do.

So perhaps once in a while we could take a vacation from running things. Y'know, step aside and let existence be the boss it already is.

Perhaps once in a while we could sit in the passenger seat, enjoy being driven, take in all those just-happening happenings.

Embracing helplessness. Embracing powerlessness.

Seeing if they're so gosh-darned awful.

Who knows? We might discover that simply being alive is more than enough.

Shocking? Perhaps.

And perhaps also relieving.

Maybe there's nothing more to do.

Maybe there's nothing more to say.

Maybe there's nothing more to it than that.

Click to get in on the Mind-Tickler every week

SEEKING CONSCIOUS OTHERS

July 10, 2018

People who are into enlightenment often feel like they can't relate to non-enlightened folk. They yearn for others who think about the same things. They wish for companions who see things the same way. Without like-minded others they feel lonely, disconnected, and separate from non-awake others.

Irony, anyone?

And it's not like it's so easy to connect with the right kind of others. Scan through some of the Consciousness groups on Facebook and watch a few zillion takes on Truth show up. There are inquirers and shamans and crystal lovers and manifesters and Advaitans and Buddhists and positive thinkers and sit-with-feelings-ers and scholarly readers and disciplined orange-robed meditating this-is-the-only-way-ers.

Ever try to truly connect with someone whose version of spirituality is different from yours?

Yeah, that's not any less alone, is it?

So people gather into "schools of thought." Kind of like the Sorting Hat at Hogwarts.

But ... this doesn't make sense. How can connectedness only be possible when there are shared interests? That's not very connected, is it?

It's starting to appear that people might be using apparent common interest in consciousness to define … themselves. Y'know, as individuals.

Separating the world into, "You're in," and "You're out."

Which kind of contradicts that little enlightened idea of no separation, no?

Not to mention those many consciousness explorers who've come to think that having that interest makes them special in some way. Superior, almost. Y'know, a few steps above those poor stuck non-awake non-spiritual types.

Hey, no ego in that, right? No separation, individualization, identity there.

'Course not.

Just looked at logically, it's pretty clear that if awakening is what is sought, it's not going to be found in the divided Us-Them teams of conscious people vs not-conscious people.

In fact it's very possible that the thought, "I need people around me who think the same as I do," actually creates the sense of isolation, rather than being its result.

Maybe "like-minded" is not only unnecessary, it's an interference.

When we sort people into Who's With Me and Who's Not, we end up focusing on thought, narrowing perception, and missing other, non-thought forms of communion.

Because whatever it is we really are, (whether it's named consciousness or God or universe or spirit or soul)…

Maybe it doesn't need one human's words to match another human's words.

Maybe it doesn't need agreement.

Maybe it doesn't need words, thoughts or points of view at all.

Besides, whatever that is, this What-We-Really-Are thing, where does it end, and the What-The-Other-Guy-Really-Is thing, begin?

If we cant find that divider, it could be because there isn't one.

In which case, we're already connected and there's nothing separating us.

No matter what thought says, no matter whether there's agreement, no matter whether thoughts are about consciousness or beer or camels.

Which would mean we're equally as connected to a NASCAR fan or a Trump supporter or a religious zealot as we are to an Enlightened Sage.

Perhaps that's shocking.

But only if we're focused on thoughts.

Move attention away from the selective sorting into agree-disagree groupings, and we begin to see that "alone and disconnected" isn't possible.

Regardless of our viewpoints on consciousness, enlightenment, and those Others.

Which is pretty sweet.

And connected.

And anything but alone.

FEAR

July 17, 2018

Fear, anxiety, worry or dread. Whatever it's called, it's on the increase.

Not a surprise really, when we consider how much there is to be anxious about. I mean, politics, money, health, global warming, kids, clean water, overpopulation, racism... The list can be lengthy.

Add in social media comparisons, pot-stirring bots, and general addiction to drama's chemical highs, and we can see how fear levels just keep cranking up.

Of course, every creature experiences fear. Even those without computers.

And it's not like they bring it on themselves. The antelope who gets thirsty doesn't cause the alligator's attack. He doesn't put the alligator there in that spot, make him hungry, make him single out one particular antelope among the many.

It's just happenstance, just a happening.

So there's no point in the antelope worrying about future alligator attacks, is there? No point in fretting, "OK, alligators hang around watering holes. I'll just never drink ever again and that should take care of it."

Instead of planning for future safety, our antelope friend drinks when thirsty, gets afraid when the alligator shows, and lives or dies.

Fear still shows up, but only when there's actually something to be afraid of in that moment.

What a concept!

Apparently animals are able to live without guaranteed safety.

Not us humans though. We require safety. We require control of fear. We need to never be afraid again. If we fail and fear happens anyway, well then, it won't conquer us! No, dammit, we'll be the boss, thank you very much.

Of course, that means we have to find ways to control events, find solutions, and plan ahead for later.

Which puts us in the position of needing to be psychic. And god.

That's calming, right? No pressure there.

Our well-being seems to depend on finding things we can do about that empty bank account, this political leader, the amount of trash in the ocean. That's time consuming. And it completely runs our lives.

Which is fine. Unless we don't like fear.

Because trying to eliminate might-come-laters increases anxiety now, and doesn't even save us from later worry.

Perhaps not an effective use of limited life hours.

So that's not working. How about something different?

Well, we could notice how we're actually doing, what's actually happening, rather than focusing on future disaster.

Y'know, like the antelope. "Oooh grass!" rather than, "Will there be an alligator later?"

Because when we fret about impending homelessness that isn't actually here, we miss the sweetness of the roof currently overhead. When we stress about the horribly-painful death sure to come later, we miss the breath, the skin holding the insides in, the heart doing its job… in this moment.

We miss the grass-filled, non-alligator, non-anxious, already-safe, present.

Imagining death, poverty, and unsafety to come makes us quake. In advance. While we're actually safe.

Yeah that's not nuts at all.

So we might try noticing the difference between actual circumstances, and thoughts about what might be.

"I'm going to be homeless" is not the same as, "I am homeless." "I could die" is not the same as, "I'm dead."

Not-scary lives in this moment. Presence is calming.

And sure, we can keep planning and trying to change circumstances. But if we want to manage fear, we might notice where peace hangs out.

Noticing doesn't change situations. Or eliminate fear.

It just reduces time spent living in Self-created horror movies.

Because constantly anticipating and planning for cancer, poverty, war, or danger that isn't actually here...

Is crazy.

And terrifying.

And there's certainly no freedom in that.

AHA! GOT IT!

July 24, 2018

The Aha! is a big favorite in the spiritual, inquiry, and therapy worlds. We love our becauses, whys, explanations. We love to understand.

We love the idea that with the right teacher, method, actions, we will figure all this out, attain enlightenment and get freedom from reaction, stress and thought.

You can see that's kind of a stacked deck though, right?

Sort of like the fox building the henhouse, containing himself inside, methodically eating up the chickens, while earnestly insisting, "I really really want to get out of this henhouse."

Because really, which Aha! can actually be trusted to not be a fox?

I mean, what is understanding anyway?

Thought.

What do we use to get that understanding?

Thought.

What is attained when we do get that realization?

Thought.

How do we even know we "got" something at all?

Yup.

Got it?

Sly fox, thinking is.

Thought creates problem and incompleteness and anxiety and pain, and then gets busy trying to nail down solutions for all that. It creates the world, tries to solve the world it created, judges what is deemed successful or what needs further realizing, and then calls us names when we fail.

Not that there's anything wrong with any of that. Thought is not an evil enemy. It's not much of anything, really.

But if it's peace or contentment or enlightenment that's wanted...

Aha!s are useless.

It's not possible to break out of the henhouse that way.

Because understanding life requires separation from life. Which creates a sense of incompleteness. Which creates a problem needing solving and understanding. Which further separates. Which further requires solutions.

When the focus is on figuring out or realizing, we separate attention from actual experience.

That never brings peace.

Aha!s perpetuate the illusion of Me as the center point, the thing that needs to get it, the thing that understands, the thing depended on to make shifts happen.

All of which makes the sense of self very important. And that's the opposite of what we supposedly are wanting.

So instead of trying to attain peace via realization, I wonder what would happen if we could turn attention to actual happenings, instead of thoughts, opinions and expectations about happenings?

Person sitting, person feeling, person thinking.

Yes, that may sound kind of uninteresting.

Because there's nothing for the mind to do. So it's totally bored by presence.

But noticing the actual might be the only way to trick the fox at its own game.

More peace than understanding.

More "Ahhh" than "Aha!"

Who knows? Thought-created chicken coops just might go poof.

And "get it" or not, we might discover that that's plenty good enough.

"You don't wake up by perfecting your dream character. You wake up by breaking free of it. There's no truth to the ego, so no degree of mastery over it results in anything true. Putting attention on the false self merely reinforces it."

~Jed McKenna

FEAR 2.0

July 31, 2018

You might run out of money. You might get sick. Politicians may kill this planet. The elephants and polar bears may disappear. Your family could get hurt, addicted, or hate you. There could soon be no clean water or edible food. You could be the victim of identity theft, have a car accident, never be able to retire, die alone.

A lot of people are scared.

Fear, worry or anxiety may feel new, or maybe it's been there all your life.

Either way, for many, there's more of it.

Yes, just for something fun to look forward to, The Mind-Tickler is here to let you know that as we age, our fears often increase.

Which makes sense if you think about it. I mean, with every day we're that much closer to being dead, for gosh sake.

What, you were hoping to get pots of gold, love, peace, enlightenment and happily ever after?

Let's face it, this being human thing is scary.

And as we get older, it gets harder to keep believing that we can make ourselves safe, as more evidence to the contrary accumulates.

That increases helplessness and brings more-frequent feelings of impending danger.

Which is why we keep trying to find preventative measures while despairing of success.

This does keep us busy. Yay for that.

Feels pretty awful though.

So maybe there's another way. Maybe rather than "How do I protect myself and my future?" the question might instead be,

"Life is vulnerable, and so what?"

The question might become, "Is immunity from every possible life contingency even necessary?"

Because maybe it's not.

After all, from the beginnings of life on this planet, existence has been tenuous and unpredictable, no one has ever been promised invulnerability, and yet, here we all are, for the most part,

Safe anyway.

Could it be that whether we know this, or whether we like what happens, or whether we feel safe…

just doesn't matter?

Of course if that's so, we probably haven't noticed. Because thought needs to figure things out. "How do bad things happen, how can I solve it when they do, and how can I avoid all bad things in the future?"

Y'know, so that it has something to do.

Because what is thought without something to think about?

Nothing, nada, zipola.

So for thousands of years, collective mind has happily focused on problems, danger, fear and solutions, and busily scared humanity silly anticipating various disasters.

And meanwhile, even so, life has gone on.

I mean, look at us. Breathing, reading, feeling, thinking, skin holding everything in where it belongs.

Most often, that's about it. If we're paying attention to this moment.

Which is different from focusing on the future, of course. That is never safe.

First, because what is the future anyway?

And second, because how would it be possible to protect against every potential contingency, every possible fall, sickness, snub, surprise?

Clearly that way lies lack of sleep and institutionalization.

So yes, over millennia people have died and had accidents and lost children and experienced pain- all the infinitely varied mixture of existence.

And yes we've been scared, especially when brushing aside present refuge to figure out how to safeguard the future.

Because It-Could-Happen-Laters are the basis for the vast majority of fears.

Which is kind of funny, no? "Let's ignore what we've got right now and figure out how to get it later."

Luckily fear really can't survive true attention to the present moment.

What relief.

Turns out, "So what?" is pretty sweet.

Nothing scary there.

NO SELF? NO WAY!

August 14, 2018

Ever notice how upset some people get when they hear, "There is no you; there is no self?"

Yes those are fighting words to a whole lot of folks. Maybe you're even one of them.

If so, the Mind-Tickler offers apologies right now for the unintentional rise in blood pressure that could be about to follow.

Because suggest, "There is no self," and people start saying things like, "Oh yeah, smarty pants? Well, go stand in front of a bus and see what happens to your no-self then!"

Or they start talking in indignant tones about their "personal experience".

As if personal experience ever proves truth. As if how we experience things, how we think about things, could never just be…

some wildly skewed point of view.

Yes, tell people they're separate individuals and everyone nods with satisfaction. Say, "You're not what you think you are," and grrrr.

Which is mighty weird if you think about it.

Because setting aside for a moment all the opinions about right, wrong, and what is or isn't true…

What exactly is so upsetting about this kind of statement? What in the words, "There is no self," warrants anger, un-friending, blocking, and mockery?

I mean if one is so sure there's a self, why get all riled if someone says otherwise? True is true, right? Who cares if others know it?

It's enough to make a curious person wonder…

What is alarmed by this "no separate self" observation?

What insists, "No no no! There most definitely is a self and it's right here. Shut up!"

Hmmm.

Mighty prickly and easily threatened, that sense-of-self thingy.

It's funny too, because... is life better with the story, "I am me, a separate individual?"

Is that peaceful?

Oh hell no.

Individual selves suffer. Individual selves are lonely, dissatisfied, incomplete and inadequate. Individual selves come with the need to fix flaws, de-tress, get other selves to love and approval of them, and get enlightened.

(Never mind that nothing that's already light has any need of enlightenment.)

Sheesh.

Who in their right mind would fight so hard to keep all that?

Meanwhile, just for something different, we might feel into the possibility of "no self" for a moment and just explore –

Whatever "no-self" is… does it get angry? Need protecting? Lack love? Care about if it's seen or known or understood?

Nah.

Much lighter, that. Freer, calmer, diffuse, clear.

Why not choose that, if only for the peace in it? Rather than fighting so hard for something that feels so bad?

And then for fun, we might also see if we can point to what needs to jump in so quickly to protect this precious story of self.

Literally- point to it.

See if we can find what real thing is afraid of any oncoming bus or opinions or words or nothingness.

See if the body- arms, legs, skin, heart, brain matter- cares at all about words, let alone ones that say, "There is no self."

I mean, given all the absolute certainty, shouldn't this be very easy to point to and locate?

So that if we don't find the self, perhaps we can at least open to the possibility that it isn't there.

Or anywhere.

Which just might leave us with the relief of nothing to do and nothing to fix.

And if we do somehow find that fragile little thing…

Perhaps, just for sanity, we can set it aside for a while.

Not because there's anything wrong with it.

But because it hurts.

And maybe, just maybe…

After years, decades, millennia...

We've had enough of that.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND BEAUTY

August 28, 2018

There are many widely-circulated opinions about what enlightenment is, what it should be, what it looks like when we do things right.

And clearly, based on social media posts and blogs, proper awakening includes blissful focus on sunsets, dolphins, flowers, love and keeping calm no matter what.

Forests, ocean, butterflies, kittens playing, children laughing- yes that's it right there.

Oh the beauty, the beauty.

There's probably no one alive who wouldn't mind having bunches more of any of that.

And yet…..

Crying children, cruelty, poverty, hunger, blood, dying species, hatred, pain, mess, agitation, self-hate...

Um… not so beautiful. Not enlightened. Not consciousness.

We say no.

Even though... there's so very much of it.

What's up with that? That's not how things should be.

Clearly we humans are doing life all wrong.

Better Keep Calm and Carry On till we get things right, or we'll remain ego-bound, non-enlightened, missing-out-ers forever.

How ‘bout we fix this mess with meditation, workshops on healing emotional wounds, therapy, inquiry.

And yet….

Maybe we've missed something.

Because, is consciousness only about beauty?

Does it make sense that consciousness would include only happy, calm, wise Buddhas and not triggered, none-too-bright family members? No pain, no anger, no fear or tears?

Does awareness not include any of that non-beauty stuff?

Maybe awareness has made a mistake.

Or…

Maybe consciousness is just as happy to be aware of suffering as it is of love.

Why wouldn't it be?

What benefit would there be to awareness to experience only smiles and not sobs too?

Take away the human judgment of right or wrong, (an evaluation no other species is afflicted with) and we might discover that consciousness is just as open to being conscious of horror as it is of laughter.

Then every experience, every feeling, every thought, is totally equal. Fear is equal to love. Rage is equal to calm. Lying is equal to silence or truth.

Because simply based on the enormous amount of evidence over millions of years, existence has plenty of room for both ugly and beauty.

Which means we're not doing this life thing wrong after all.

Whether in pain and traumatized, or calm and laughing with joy, no matter what is being experienced,

we can't help but do it perfectly.

What a relief- It's all equal.

So pain is beauty too.

Not as in, "Yes give me more suffering!"

But if we can consider that whatever does show up is all part of an aware experience, then we might carry on, living the same life, just without the overlay of, "No no no, this is not right!"

And without condemnation for being wrong, broken, or unenlightened.

Meanness and kindness, joy and rage, suffering and bliss.

All included, welcome, taken in as is.

Accepting. Experiencing. Existing. Conscious. Aware.

Wow.

Oh the beauty.

NOOOO, NOT THE VOID!!

September 4, 2018

Nothingness. The supposed goal of every enlightenment seeker.

Everyone knows we gotta get ourselves into the void somehow. We need to see through self, empty the mind of thoughts, die to the ego, and experience the disappearance of everything we know and love.

OK!

But...

Let's get real- that's kind of terrifying.

We hate that nothingness thing.

We far prefer something. We like filled up, not empty. We like to have something. We like to get something. We like extra, lots, plenty, more.

We are really not interested in not-enough, emptiness, void. That all means lack.

No one wants that.

Perhaps this is partly why, at the same time we're supposedly trying to attain enlightenment, we're also spending countless hours looking for ways to be more- more complete, more enough, more calm, more healthy. We think- a lot- about how to get rid of thought, while conveniently filling empty space with more thought.

Being less, being nothing, "killing off" the Me- in our minds those enlightenment requirements equal deprivation, nullification, destruction.

Nooooo thank you.

Yeah, better to have fear, anger, sadness, which may not be fun but are at least better than emptiness and death.

We can fill up on intensity. Nothingness just leaves us hungry.

Meanwhile, here we are right now talking about emptiness like it's some thing.

Nope.

And maybe that's part of what we've been failing to notice.

Because thoughts are nothing and we're used to those. The "inner world" is nothing and we're used to that. Feelings are empty and we're used to that.

Emptiness is actually just business as usual. We're already experiencing it all the time.

We're used to it. We're already nothing.

And we're fine.

Stories of Me continue just fine.

Void or no void.

Besides, there's actually no need to be afraid of nothingness.

First of all, because it's nothing.

And second, because there can't be something without nothing to contain it. In fact there can't be anything without nothing.

Space contains the whole universe. That includes galaxies and black holes and egos and stories and personalities and crazy thoughts.

Empty space holds all the somethings. Including all that stuff we want more of. Including us.

Turns out we can live and survive only within the void.

So the existence we're so afraid of losing actually can't happen at all without emptiness.

The void means birth, existence, experience, everythingness.

Which is the opposite of death.

Nothingness is enormously, incomprehensibly, full rather than empty.

It's a fullness that can't be used up, harmed, disappeared, or killed off.

We can't die to that.

Talk about complete.

Talk about safe, full, and more than enough.

It's the ultimate in everythingness.

Including surrender, relief and gratitude.

Now that's spacious.

Fall on in.

HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE 'EM!

September 11, 2018

"There is no self. There is ONLY self. We are awareness. We are objects within awareness. I am that. I am nothing. There is true nature. I'm in relationship with consciousness."

And of course my personal favorite: "Become aware of awareness."

Sure. Let's make the thing that is aware of the thing be aware of being aware of the thing.

Okay!

This is what happens when we turn to the mind to figure things out.

Even though... you can see we're never going to truly know the answers to any of that, right?

Because even when we have absolute certainty that we've experienced Truth and know the answers… have we got the answers?

The mind can only see and understand so much. It is limited by its own capabilities.

Which is why it can't understand itself. It isn't big enough for that job.

This is a key flaw in all those inquiries, enlightenment methods, attempts to "see beyond" the self, to self improve.

I mean, we don't even know what the self is, let alone how to improve it.

It's just not possible to know what's bigger than ourselves. So any claims of understanding are self-serving. In every sense of that very apt expression.

And no matter how much we may insist, posture and strut about it, when we think we know something... we're being played the fool by thought.

Because the mind only pretends to understand. While not the least bit interested in understanding.

After all, what would happen if thinking was able to truly see how nothing, insignificant, limited and unimportant it really is?

Yeah, no way thought's going to be good with that.

So the only reasonable state is, "I don't know."

Because honey, we don't.

No matter how articulately anyone expounds their point of view, it remains an opinion.

So all the blah blah blah about consciousness and "I am"?

That's masturbatory nonsense. Just mind playing with itself.

And yes it may be comforting to think we understand consciousness. But really we're never truly going to be able to do anything but guess. Even though mind loudly insists it knows something.

Nothing wrong with any of this, of course.

It's fine to play with our selves. Nothing wrong with a little self manipulation.

It's just that we'll wait forever for that happy ending.

Silly, unsatisfied little things.

Aren't we adorable?

ENLIGHTENMENT 2.0

September 18, 2018

So many people have had awakening experiences and haven't written a book.

So many have the experience of, "I had it. And then I lost it."

In sessions and groups, I hear this over and over.

Enlightenment is quite the tease it seems.

It shows up for a while, bringing the requisite peace, the non-reactive contentment, the bliss.

Oh yeah! We shall say yes to this sweetness. Enlightenment has arrived!

And so have you, now-enlightened one.

Until just as suddenly, on its own timetable and without fan-fair, after hanging out a few moments, hours, days, months, it slips off again.

Hey where'd you go? Adios, enlightenment.

And then you're back to the same ol' judging, dissatisfied, thought-believing life.

Only now, you have had a tantalizing taste of sugar.

What person in his right mind wouldn't want to set about trying to get that back?

Although…. you can see the potential carrot-chasing in this, right?

There's a better yum out there; better than everyday fare. You had it for a while. You're hungry for more.

And what happens to the present, to what is here, when the desire to get back the enlightenment experience runs the show?

"I know! Let's trash what is here and pine for /hope for the return of what isn't."

Dissatisfaction with what we have. Desire for nicer feelings, nicer thoughts, less ego, a moratorium on judgments.

Just business as usual with a fancier label slapped on it.

Besides, is enlightenment even supposed to last forever? I mean, I realize that's what all the spiritual mythology says, but could it be that all that spiritual blah blah is (gasp) wrong? Could it be the forever-enlightened life is actually just carrot-nonsense?

Everything on this planet comes and goes; nothing is permanent. Why should enlightenment be any different?

Whether you consider awakening a point of view, an experience, an understanding, or a feeling state, why shouldn't it come and go like everything else?

And then, isn't there's that sense that you- with all your study and retreats and satsangs and meditating and extra-special giftedness or whatever- you made awakening show up to begin with?

Of course then, that also means you failed. Blew it. You made it leave. "I made this happen and I made it un-happen."

Powerful, self-important, all-revolves-around-you You.

Pretty darned Self centered, no? Lots of "you-ing" involved.

Is it logical that the experience of transcending self would somehow simultaneously make self more important, more special?

Or might such reasoning instead confirm ego, just with a new label?

Maybe you can see that this makes no sense, and that you simply can't get what you're looking for that way.

So yeah, had an enlightenment experience and lost it?

Well, OK.

Liked or not, this right here…this is What Is.

Experience comes and go as it pleases.

And without the idea that scoring "enlightenment" is better...

It could be that acceptance of the present, with whatever situations, feelings, judgments, behaviors and thoughts show up, is where the experience you're wishing would come back actually lives.

Besides, once something is seen it can't be unseen.

Which is yet another way of saying, what you seek is already here.

This experience you've got right now is the enlightenment you crave.

Which means there's nothing to improve, nothing to change, nothing to get back, nothing to seek.

That would not be business as usual, would it.

Who knows, it might even be downright EnLightening.

ACCEPTANCE

September 25, 2018

Acceptance. Sounds great. Let's!

Till we realize that "accepting" means relaxing into whatever comes… poverty, sleeplessness, sickness, death, betrayal, lies, suffering…

Whether we like it or not.

Much of the time, we decidedly do not like it.

I mean sure, acceptance is fine, but…not this. Because c'mon, we all need to sleep! We need health! Money! Safe children! Duh.

We're pretty sure we can't be ok unless we get what we want.

And if that eludes us, bring on the sobs, the black depression, the lying in bed refusing to get up.

Still, existence doesn't care what any human likes. It kind-of has Likes of its own.

So we could always try pretending to accept, in hopes of tricking life into making bad situations go away. Perhaps by thinking right, we can make sleep come, cancer leave, death lose interest, and keep money from disappearing?

Oh powerful us.

Though that's not acceptance. That's manipulation. That's trying to bend existence to our will.

Pssst- a secret: Existence is bigger than we are. No human is big enough to manipulate it.

Okay. So does that mean we have to accept situations we don't like?

Nope. But let's face it- Not-Liking feels awful.

I mean, how much of life's heaviness and suffering results directly from refusal to accept anything other than What We Like?

Trying to score wants and likes comes with bunches of misery. Misery solidifies the sense of self.

Which means Not-Liking is actually a subtle trick to maintain the Self story.

Fine. So what?

Well, just for fun, rather than focusing on how to get what we Like, we might consider focusing on the Likes themselves. As in, is it really so darn important to like any experience? And... is it really worth the pain if we don't?

Meanwhile, circumstances continue to come and go. And if it was possible to accept even Not-Liked situations...who knows? Life, as it is, just might be more peaceful.

Which doesn't mean we have to lie down and do nothing. It's just that, once it's seen that we can't change most situations, and that pouting and wailing change nothing... We might be willing to stop trying to overcome and out-maneuver existence. We might even be able to give up that fight.

Which is so much easier than perpetually hurling ourselves against that wall.

Life, happening, reaction, experience.

This.

Liked or not.

Acceptance of both liked and disliked, dissolving our sense of individual importance.

And leaving...

Such relief.

And who doesn't like that?

LYING LIARS, LYING

October 2, 2018

One of my family members used to pride themselves on never lying. This was ridiculous of course, because of course they did lie sometimes.

Everyone does.

Someone says, "How are you today?" and we say, "Good!" when just moments ago we were curled in a ball sobbing and wishing for the mercy of death.

And yet from the earliest age it's made clear that lying is bad and one mustn't do it.

So breaking this down… here is a behavior no one is ever supposed to do, and everyone does it anyway, and then occasionally everyone gets pissed-off about it.

What a weird game.

Ever wonder what's up with that? Ever wonder why lies are so infuriating, and why, if no one is supposed to lie, everyone does it?

It couldn't have anything to do with the fact that these individual characters themselves are a lie to begin with, could it? After all, we're not what we say we are.

Yes we deny knowing this, and yes we pretend to be confused by such statements.

But know it, we do.

How do we know we know?

Well for one thing, we call these lives of ours, "stories," for a reason. We play our roles, act like ourselves, set the scene, indulge in drama, tell our tales.

Hidden in plain sight right in everyday language is plenty of proof that we know this reality thing is made up. That the whole deal is a lie. An everybody-agrees fiction.

As if all of us have gotten together in the middle of the night to conspire and agree to pretend it ain't so.

And then there are rules to maintain that fiction, supposedly for the benefit of all.

And one of those rules is, "Thou shalt not lie." As in, "Thou shalt not expose this pretense."

Even though we're lying every minute. And even though we have to, if we're going to protect and continue the idea that we are these individuals.

And then along comes some blatant showman who says, "Haha! I'm not playing by those rules. I'm going to make stuff up and not even hide it."

And the rest of us are not amused.

Because liars show us that our point of view is flimsy. They show how malleable "truth" is, and how made-up these versions of reality are. Lying breaks the tacit agreement about how to present the scene.

Oh this makes us mad. After all, if we're going to play by the cover-up rules, dammit, they better too. What good is it for us to pretend to be an individual if others are not going to play along?

Which is why so many of us feel foolish when someone lies to us outright. We feel exposed, tricked, done wrong.

The Prime Directive is that the lovely filmy Truth-dream must never be betrayed. And instead, liars show us that the veil is gauzy.

Now of course, I'm not saying, "Yay! Lies!" But when we begin to see how made-up reality is, perhaps we might be able to admire a certain amount of... creativity. After all, we can make it anything.

Like my family member, who has stopped lying about lying and now just falsifies outright like a dang baller.

We get to watch reality be reimagined.

It's wild how liberating the honesty of knowing we are a lie can be.

And really, once it's seen that none of this is True, why not go all out? Why not Donald-Trump our way right into freedom? Break out of the box once in a while, and like any painter or artist...

Simply make that sh*t up?

Reality is here for our invention.

We may as well have some fun with it.

Because whatever is "real," if anything, will continue no matter what words come out of humans' mouths.

And it certainly won't mind our tall tales.

DEATH!

October 9, 2018

If there's anything we humans do not like, it's death.

Death of others comes with tears and loss and pain and guilt up the wazzooo.

Death of our selves is terrifying, menacing, and horror-filled.

We really don't like any of that.

After all, we've spent years cultivating this existence, this sense of Me, this image and personality and individual. Decades have gone into improving it, calming it, evolving it. All that organic kale. All those sit-ups. Suntan lotion. Satsangs. Therapy.

And then death comes along and says, "Ok honey, time for the heart to stop now. Buh-bye."

And we're disappeared.

So much time has gone into pretending this Self exists and that it's the center of everything, and then in the end we disappear anyway.

Sheesh.

So naturally we fear death. We're terrified of losing this carefully maintained Self. We reject anything that shows so completely and unarguably how powerless, unimportant, and insignificant these Me thingies are.

We hate that we're not the center of existence. We hate that there doesn't seem to be a center of existence.

Dammit.

And then, Life has the gall to go on. Without us. Without the Me.

Noooooo!

Although…

It could be that even though the individual appears to be gone, something remains.

Because while the personality does seem to leave, along with our particular story, stories aren't alive. They're fiction. Fiction can't die.

Which means the stories don't really die.

Besides, is that what we are? A personality? A story?

Maybe we've had it all wrong, all this time.

Maybe we don't actually die.

Like, ever.

Yes the body dies. But whatever it is that makes us what we are, whatever it is that animates the body… does it die?

That, whatever-it-is, is not physical. It's not biological. It's not a thing, not living, not breathing, not locatable.

How would that die or disappear? And where would it go, that it isn't already?

So, in terms of what we really are, whether it's an alive body or a dead one- maybe it's all the same either way.

Which makes death a non-event. Since what we really are has never been alive to begin with.

There is amazing peace in surrendering to the truth of this.

Without the lie of This-Body-Is-My-Self, without the limitation of constant Self-maintenance, what's left is diffuse, quiet, connected to and as everything, steady, everywhere, and infinite.

There's nothing left to protect or package or improve. There's nothing left to be afraid of.

And there's nothing left to be unhappy about that.

What freedom.

Plenty to not hate in that.

TRANSFORMATION

October 16, 2018

Transformation. Everybody wants it.

Different life circumstances, different thoughts, better feelings, a little enlightenment.

We all want something else.

Even when things are good we want something better, or more, or new.

And certainly there's no shortage of folks to help us score any of that. Advice is plentiful for getting healthy, making money, shifting stressful thoughts, finding happiness, seeing through the self, creating "boundaries," finding safety, feeling more peaceful.

You name it, there's a bunch of gurus and methods ready to fix it. Transformation is an industry so enormous it's mind-boggling.

Even though it makes no sense.

Because all over the globe, billions of us are focusing intently on the big head up front and disregarding the little man behind the curtain.

How else to explain our not noticing that feelings, thoughts and situations *already* transform, every single second, without our intervention, inquiry, understanding, or effort?

Sooooo many hours and monies spent trying to effect "changes" that happen on their own, anyway.

Besides, what *is* this shift we're so intent on?

I mean, change from what, and to what?

Could it be that all this devotion to improvement is just a general sense of dissatisfaction with the self story?

Because dissatisfaction certainly works that way, to keep focus on the illusory self. After all, if this Me thing is inadequate and in need of repair, then thought has plenty to keep it going.

Problem solving can always be counted on to give thought something to think about.

Otherwise, what is so all-fired important about transformation?

Truly, *what for?*

Not to mention, what real thing desires all this shifting in the first place? Certainly the universe, consciousness, energy or true nature, whatever that even is, doesn't need any human to learn or grow or change.

So here's a startling thought:

Maybe this constant rejection of what is, what we have, what we are, isn't required.

Maybe however much health or money or approval we already have is enough. Maybe the personality that's here, with its kooky flaws and weird moods, is good enough. Maybe the sadnesses, anxieties, angers and other feelings we experience are actually welcomed by existence and don't need to be fixed.

In fact maybe it's always been OK, and we've always been OK, as is, all along.

Even though thought has said otherwise for thousands of years.

If this could be seen, what would be left to do then but simply be…

satisfied.

Well.

That's different.

Now of course there's nothing wrong with constantly trying and hoping for transformation. Billions of us have done just that, so it's pretty clear that existence has said, "Yes" to that too.

It's just that it's an unending game. And it hurts.

So luckily transformation is not a requirement.

We might come to know and understand this.

Or not.

It doesn't matter. Knowing it changes nothing, either way.

Still, we don't have to try so hard.

What a relief.

Radical, even.

A helluva transformation.

One that might just... change everything.

THINKING OF YOU?

October 23, 2018

One friend worries that people think she's stupid. Another frets that her family thinks she's a bad mother. This one is certain people think she's a loser, and another wonders what people would think if they knew about her sexual fantasies.

Humans want other humans to think well of us. We want parents to love us, bosses to respect us, partners to find us attractive. We want admiration, appreciation and approval.

Lots of it.

Of course not from everyone. But from someone or group of someones?

Yeah.

Now this pervasive obsession may sometimes be subtle. And perhaps this is where some Mind-Tickler readers may break into that ol' familiar song about how they don't give a f**k what anybody thinks.

All while making sure to say and post and insist that they don't care.

Because they want us to know they don't care.

Because they care what we think.

The dirty truth is that everyone cares what at least some people think.

Well, about themselves, anyway.

"What will people think? About MEEEEEE."

Are you thinking about ME? No? Well whatever is interfering with that important business, stop it right now and come back to what matters.

Me.

Let's focus on Me. What do you think about Me? Do you like Me? Do you think I'm great? Do you think I'm crap? Well f*ck you then. Wait, you don't love Me? Why not, what's wrong with Me? Can I fix Me so you think I'm great? Can I fix you so you think I'm great?

Anyone notice that all thinking comes back to being about the Me, in one form or another?

Kids failing school? Oh no, I'm a bad parent. Running out of money? I'm a loser. Getting fat? I'm unlovable. Love music? Dude I am so cool. Global warming? Powerless doomed me and mine.

Like a boomerang. Every thought. Every time. Back to Me.

What that does is continually and effectively serve to hide that we're not what we think we are.

And that no one else is, either.

Which is why there's only one reason anyone gives a crap what people think.

And that's to bolster this Me idea and keep it front and center. Let's keep all thought pointed right here, all the time, so that it feels like a real thing.

Turns out, thousands of years of human concern about other peoples' thoughts has simply been selfing, keeping the veil closed, trying to pull off the ruse.

"Am I fooling them? Do they buy it?"

This provides a solid sense of self.

Which is not to be confused with an*actual*self.

Caring what people think is a strategy for pretending the mask is real, and for projecting and protecting... an image.

Even though images don't need protecting and don't care a whit about thought.

And even though whatever is behind the mask doesn't care whether thoughts say the "right" things, or not.

Whew. No wonder many of us are so tired.

"Look! Everyone's pointing at me and thinking about me! That must mean I'm here! Yay! Keep it going!"

This locates us. It's GPS for the story of self.

Because what real thing would even want to be the center of all that unrelenting attention anyway?

So yes, thought may appear to define us and tell us we're good or bad or kind or bitchy.

But what cares?

And what needs all that identity, location, and I'm-right-here-ness?

And what sends out that constant wordy blah blah rumination and Me-focus?

Nothing, honey.

Nothing at all.

POLITICS AND THE DREAM

October 30, 2018

These can feel like such hard political times, what with AK 17s murdering people who are minding their own business and babies in cages and poison in food and animals butchered for sport.

Nazis, libtards, deplorables. Oh my.

Which is why, when people are deep in their indignation, and then they get comments such as...

"The ‘ME' is a dream in an illusory world. There is no Self. The world is within, there is no outer. The answer is love. We're all one. It's all good..."

Well, such supposedly-helpful comments can be pretty much infuriating.

All that certainty. All that mystifying woo. Right in the face of all those tears.

Excuse me, my lovelies. But shut up. Stop with all that non-dual spewing.

Because for most folks on this planet, life is not a "dream." For them, this is what's simply known as "the real world."

And real-world-believing humans are pissed. Terrified. They have seen the drawn sides. They have chosen one.

They're not about to start loving up the other side with compassion and understanding.

I mean, let's face it. Whichever team is chosen, right or wrong, one point of view or the other… this life thing is hard. Being human is hard. This apparent world with all its apparent other humans is hard.

Experience may be experiencing itself but it's still a hard experience for these individual experiences.

And then, even if someone somehow does come to see that it's a dream, what are they supposed to do at that point, ignore the illusion? Deny it? Meditate it away?

What for?

I mean, one might almost think some spiritual folks are afraid of the dream, the way they keep pushing for everyone to see that it's not real.

Now of course, The Mind-Tickler could join right in and make a very good case for, "Dudes, this is an illusion, so chill." Which we've done many times, and brilliantly too (insert demure eyelash batting here.)

It's just that when so many are in the middle of a good despair or outrage or troubling situation, that kind of input is not helpful.

I mean, unless you're a fan of kerosene.

Because make-believe or not, this is where humans spend the bulk of our time- here in the very real-seeming illusion, reacting and functioning and crying and hurting and laughing.

Pretending that's not so is also make-believe.

So how to deal with this painful human business?

Well maybe it's possible to just experience the fantasy, in all its intense richness, and also see it for what it is.

Maybe there's a place for both the tribulations of self, and also the awareness of non-self.

Maybe it's not one or the other. Maybe it's and also.

Strident political action and also video-gaming non-action. Fear and fury and also safety that is literally always present. Pain and also ignored-but-

there-anyway non-pain.

In the dream and also woke to the dream.

Both. Simultaneously.

Because admitted or not, even when we're "awake", the dream still goes on.

We live, we think, we function, we shake an outraged fist to the sky.

Each an individual, unique, and with a point of view we're (every single one of us) absolutely certain is The Right One.

And also…

Absolutely none of that.

And...

It's all good.

GOT NEWS OUTRAGE?

November 13, 2018

Hellish fires, starving children, mistreated animals, migrant suffering. Politics, lies, unfairness, immorality.

There's no lack of situations to stir up strong feelings.

And while the news media has always tried to rile us up, always been about fear, drama, tears, always poked the story-craver in us....

These days, the news business– particularly cable news- is booming through the roof. You want intensity? Cable news has got yer intensity right here.

Want proof?

"*Trump*."

See?

Love him or hate him, the man is a ratings bonanza, and we're drawn in to the circus.

Humans just love a good outrage. Require it, actually.

We get high on intensity. Not high as in, "Wheee!" but souped up, marinated in the adrenaline and other body chemicals induced by drama.

And because we're junkies, we seek out strong feelings. On the news, on Facebook, on Twitter. We gotta have it.

Hate, fury, love, despair.

We feel most alive when we're feeling strongly.

As in, "I feel, therefore I exist."

Even when it's awful, intensity seems better than its flip side- boredom.

We hate that.

And peace, love, stability, even enlightenment- all those feelings we supposedly really want?

Guess what? After a while, they're boring.

Too calm. Too quiet. No problem to solve. No thing to think about.

C'mon, no one can maintain a sense of self like that.

No. Turn on the news and see what Trump did today. Give us something juicy to feel.

Focus on feeling solidifies the sense of self. Intensity tricks us into feeling real, so we don't notice we're not.

Which is why there's a constant craving for excitement and strong feelings of any kind.

Not that there's anything wrong with this.

It's just that this focus causes us to miss a lot.

We miss the OK-ness all around us. We miss the enough-ness of it all. We miss that our preference for certain feelings over others is arbitrary and unnecessary.

And while we're feeding the craving for intensity, we particularly fail to notice that we are experience itself…

the actual experience…

not the experiencer.

When we're focused on all that intensity, we think we're The One Who Feels.

Which naturally creates a strong sense of self.

Instead, if attention could be moved from feelings to just the possibility that we are the experience itself…

We might discover that that usually ever-present center point, that ME which always feels like it's the middle of every single thing…

Vanishes.

We might suddenly see how diffuse, how everywhere, we actually are.

We might suddenly realize that any one experience is as good as any and every other.

Y'know, because we're all of them.

So. Does this mean we have to change the craving for emotionality, or accept boring monotony, or try not to desire?

Nah. What for?

It's just that considering that we are every experience enables a freedom, a decentralized vastness, that the ME will never have.

Which is pretty exciting.

Intense, even.

I mean, an intensity junkie could get high off that.

So check the news, Twitter, the conspiracy forums. March, rally, protest, cheer, or ignore it all.

We're all of it. Every feeling, every wild intensity, every boring yawn. Every thought, political sneer, party or side.

Outrage, fear, resignation, monotony, peace, love.

We're it.

Equal.

ME disappears.

Hey, where'd you go?

News at eleven.

ENOUGH

December 4, 2018

Is it possible...

y'know, just possible,

that this, right here, as it is,

is

enough?

And if so,

then what could "awakening" give you

that you don't already have?

"If you chop off my head then my final days were interesting."

~Tyrion Lannister

ENLIGHTENMENT: THE HUNT

January 22, 2019

"You wander from room to room hunting for the diamond that is already around your neck."

~Rumi

I hear from a lot of spiritual devotees, and even more than usual lately, what with the BATGAP interview and all.

And I'm sure you'll be unsurprised to learn that they want something.

Of course you know what that something is.

Yep.

Enlightenment.

They want it. They reeeeaaallly want it.

Enough to dedicate years to hunting it, trying to figure out its ways, hoping lightning will strike them the same way it did Tolle and Byron Katie. Enough to attend satsangs and retreats so that some teacher's supposed wisdom might be contagious. Meditating. Inquiring and pulling apart thoughts and feelings to within an inch of their lives.

Enough to be down on themselves and blue and ashamed because despite all that, awakening doesn't seem to have happened.

It's exhausting just writing about. Imagine what it must be like to live it, focusing so much of one's one wild and precious life on attaining…

Well, what, exactly?

Perfect bliss? No suffering? A desireless state?

Can one achieve a "desireless state" by desiring something so intently?

Can one suffer less by enduring so much dissatisfaction with what's already here, while waiting, trying and hoping for something else?

Can one achieve perfect stays-forever bliss when everything on this planet comes and goes? Does it make sense that bliss, perfect or not, is the one exception?

Perhaps there are a whole lot of people out there earnestly chasing something that's unobtainable.

And the question rarely raised is…

What do they want this for?

What's the big deal?

I mean, what do seekers imagine they'll have once they've gotten themselves a share of this voodoo magic?

Are they thinking that they'll be special, elite, superior to all the sad loser others who haven't scored in the awakening department?

Man I hope not. Because that doesn't sound particularly enlightened or ego-free now, does it?

Is it a sense of doing things wrong, living wrong, not being deserving?

Well, what are the odds that consciousness, awareness, the universe, god or whatever name is applied, sits around with nothing to do but punish those that don't fall in line, or has any thought of good/bad, right/wrong, should/shouldn't?

"Deserving" is a man-made concept, and as is typical for us wacky humans, it's a crazy one.

Because existence has created us. Why would it suddenly have a problem with us as we are, enlightened or not?

Ok then, how about the sense of missing out- could that be the driving force behind all this yearning?

How about if we ask the enlightenment hounds, since they've studied and read up on so much about all this…

Is "missing out" even possible?

Thought may say so, and a "sense" may be generously provided, but…

Here we are in the present.

Exactly what is missing?

That so-called "Sense" keeps otherwise perceptive folks from noticing that what's missing is... nothing. Nothing is missing.

So then, the only other possible driver for seeking enlightenment is the desire to not hurt.

Let's be honest, this is the only real reason anyone gives a flying potato about waking up.

People want to feel better, to not get angry, not be afraid, not cry. People want to control thoughts, be calm, be untriggered, and as one of my clients says, be "happy for no reason."

People want to choose their preferred feeling.

And then they want to stay in that feeling forever and ever.

Never mind that the chasing of this unicorn makes them specifically unhappy.

This is the most common falsehood about this enlightenment business.

Because it makes enlightenment no different than wine or sugar or any other drug- just a way to attain and hold on to a preferred feeling state.

And all that focus on a feel-better goal, and the failure to attain it, conveniently creates a sense of the self as real.

Which is the exact opposite of the enlightenment being sought.

Seeking actually prevents the desired goal from being achieved.

Now I realize that my saying this may infuriate or scandalize many Mind-Tickler readers.

So let me make it up to you.

Have you considered the possibility that the awakening you seek is already here? That you already have what you've been chasing?

Could it be the only thing in the way of your knowing this is the thought, "I'm not enlightened?"

Maybe you can take a break from all those podcasts and retreats, have a life, experience whatever feeling happens to temporarily blow through in all its glory,

And let it just be.

Why not?

As we've said here many times, maybe this is already it.

Labeled "enlightened" or not.

Nowhere to go, nothing to attain, nothing wrong with you as you are.

Which, paradoxically, might be exactly the awakening you've been working so hard for, for so long.

Here it is!

Put your feet up, have some bonbons, get some sun.

May as well enjoy whatever's here.

After all, just like that sun and the bonbons,

it won't last.

And yet it is all there is, and complete right now.

SPIRITUAL BAD GIRL

February 5, 2019

It seems I have been a very bad spiritual girl.

Bad Judy.

Luckily lots of wiser-than-I people have stepped up to verbally spank the errant spiritual concepts right outta me.

Whew! I guess I needed that.

Now, I can't call them non-dualists, since there's a lot of right/wrong, should/shouldn't, good/bad and us/them being espoused, plus big helpings of ego and certainty.

So it's pretty darn dual.

But there are plenty of quotes by Nisargadatta and Ramana included to eliminate any doubt that it's the correct form of spirituality.

In fact, I mentioned to my elderly mother that I had some ideas that weren't necessarily common ones, and she said, "Maybe you should take the hint."

Damn. Et tu, mom?

The thing is, over the centuries many new options in all kinds of fields have been considered outrageously wrong, simply because they were outside the usual.

For example there was Copernicus, who dared challenge what everyone, especially the religious people, knew to be true- the idea that the earth was the center of the universe and everything revolved around it. People were

horrified at his wrongness, and his supporters, including Galileo, were actually imprisoned simply for agreeing with him.

So gosh, when you think about that, a few Facebook spankings are no big deal.

And then somehow, over time, the heretics became the standard for what's right, and anyone disagreeing with them became the dangerous outliers.

Weird, huh? I mean, you'd think by now we could just skip over the, "Shut up, you wrong, bad, crazy, stupid loon!" part and get down to the, "I admire your innovative thinking!" part, right off the bat.

But no, that's not how we work here. The game must be played. We can't cut corners.

Now of course I'm not equating anything I have to say with the likes of Copernicus and Galileo.

I'm just asking…

How is any new idea ever supposed to be considered, if people insist on turning only to dead people and their opinions, to define Truth?

How can any never-considered-that, well-that's-different, fresh breeze ever be allowed to blow through the mind, when bookshelves and well-behaved opinions are blocking every door and window?

And it's not just the old stuff. Even not-dead-yet current sages may be so steeped in the proper and accepted ways that they regularly recite the "right" lines, still mistaking rule-following and mass agreement for Truth.

The fact is, we humans prefer the same-ol'. We like the herd. We don't want to stand out (at least not totally), lest the lions take notice. We want to belong, to be right, and to be part of some group, even if it's only a group of other weird people.

We hate those odd ones who wander away. We hate the offbeat. We hate the different.

We hate the individual.

Mainly because, underneath all the mocking, bullying and ego posing as wisdom, we know we are not these know-it-all individuals. We know it's an act. There's so much proof of this. I won't write it here, because there have been several Mind-Ticklers about this already.

Still, our language betrays the fakery every day.

So yes we have to act tough to hide the pretense and protect that story. And yes, when we gang up with "like-minded" others and draw sides, we're reassured that we've got a team to belong to.

Otherwise, we don't even know who we are. New ideas may often mean lost identity.

Not that that's a bad thing.

I mean, isn't that some of what we want enlightenment for?

Meanwhile, privately, in PMs and emails and skype chats, away from the show-off spotlight of social media, many people have quietly written of their own spankings, and their own discoveries, and their own relief that anyone, anyone, might be willing to test the limits on this well-worn and rule-bound spiritual path.

So another herd forms, of those who secretly disagree with convention, or feel alone and weird for being left out of the older herd.

Which is just how we humans work.

It doesn't "mean" anything.

Still it can be good, and comforting, and a relief, just to know that new herds can form.

So you're certainly welcome to join me in the wild and weird new field, out beyond right and wrong.

Or form your own! And I'll come visit.

"I am not out to liberate anybody. You have to liberate yourself. What I have to say will not do it. I am only interested in clearing away the occultation and mystification in which those people in the 'holy business' have shrouded the whole thing. Maybe I can convince you not to waste a lot of time and energy, looking for a state which does not exist except in your imagination."

~U.G.Krishnamurti

RID OF THOUGHT

February 12, 2019

"Is not thinking itself a notion in the mind?"

~Nisargadatta

"I've been trying to make it die. It's got to go. I need to be rid of it."

I hear this often.

What is this terrible, evil, life-can't-be-right-till-it's-gone thingy?'

Thought. Mind. Ego. Personality. Different words, same same.

Whatever it's called, it needs to get G. O. N. E.

Good spiritual seekers know that thoughts need to be slowed down so there's more space in between. Better yet, disappear those suckers completely. Mind-stillness is better. Silence is better. And let's face it- the internal voice is a tyrant. Who wouldn't want that crab to shut up?

Clearly, thought-eradication is necessary for enlightened, self-less, clear, transcendence.

And of course guess who it's up to, to make all that happen?

Enter helplessness, shame, guilt, secrecy and resignation.

Great, give us some more o' that!

Although …

Good luck having a wonderful happy life *without* mind.

First, because if it did leave, where would it go- the isle of exiled minds?

And second, because what would we be left with, without thought?

Can you say "coma?"

Maybe just some kind of sausage with feet.

Could it be we *need* this mind we are so sure stands between us and enlightenment and a better life?

Not to mention, when we are perpetually looking for ways to make thought leave, we are perpetually having to …

keep seeking.

Because thoughts keep coming. Ego doesn't vanish (A quick glimpse of all the enlightened sages on Facebook will verify this.)

Mind drives the car, helps with homework, plans the workweek.

Trying to make it disappear is a never-ending exercise in failure.

While on the other hand, if we suddenly saw that perhaps mind *doesn't* have to die, that we're fine even with thought/self/personality still seemingly "here" …

There would be nothing more to chase.

Surprise!

What we've been seeking all this time actually might require the opposite of trying to eradicate mind.

Besides, is mind even kill-able at all? Is that truly a possibility?

That implies that it's a real thing.

When actually, it's a concept. So is the idea that mind/thought/ego exists at all.

We've been hell-bent on getting rid of an idea.

And ideas are... well, what, exactly?

Not to mention, *what* wants the mind gone?

That would be…

Itself.

Ok so let's get this straight. Thought says, "Yes I'm a very bad nonexistent thing, and I need to make it my life-long goal to make my very own self vanish forever."

Um, what?

For years we've been spinning in circles trying to eliminate thoughts which have been pretending to figure out solutions to problems they manufactured in the first place.

That's a stacked deck which puts yet another idea – the sense of self- at the center of everything.

Nothing wrong with that. It's just exhausting.

So what if instead, we could let the ideas just have their little games? Let them run free, like happy ponies in a field.

After all, they're ideas. They're a whole bunch of nothing.

They just don't matter.

There's nothing to eradicate.

Which means blessedly, there's nothing for us to do.

Which means finally we can have some fun watching what happens when we're free of having to …

Save nothing …

From itself.

"He felt that his whole life was some kind of dream and he sometimes wondered whose it was and whether they were enjoying it."

~Douglas Adams

SCARY FUTURE

February 19, 2019

"It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole lives waiting to start living."

~Eckhart Tolle

This weekend, a dear friend and client died in a fatal accident.

Which of course makes for much sadness.

Like so many folks, my friend tried so hard to do things right and protect herself from the future. She saved the retirement money, ate the kale, wore the helmet.

And yet, along came "Accident" anyway.

What makes it an "accident" vs. an "on purpose?"

Well, "accident" means it was unplanned-for. Which of course it was. No one could have planned for this.

Despite all those decades of midnight mental self-protection strategy sessions about how to be safe in the future.

So much for plans.

For most of us, out of the blue will come the who-could-have-known truck, the lightning, the going to sleep and not waking up. Very few get to tell death when, where and how to show up.

And when we begin to see that truly we have zero control despite all those great plans and intentions...

We start to understand why thought is terrified of the future. We start to understand why future-planning so often comes with fear, worry, and waking in the night just for anxious sweating.

Turns out, despite mind's constant focus on self protection, existence has its own ideas about what's supposed to happen next.

It is simply not going to be controlled by mind's plans.

I mean, talk about powerless.

And hoo boy, thought simply hates that.

Thought hates that it is not the boss of the future. It hates that it can plan and scheme to protect and in the end existence says, "No. Not that. This." anyway.

Nothing brings home our helpless know-nothingness better than the so-called future.

And dammit that's scary stuff.

Even though "the future" is only a concept, a bunch of mental images about things that haven't happened and usually never do happen.

Which mind somehow keeps failing to notice or accept.

Still, if we think about how many times we have been afraid of potential looming disaster vs. how many times said disaster actually happened, well…

We might begin to see that thought is an exceptionally incompetent psychic.

That sucker is guessing. It truly has no idea what is actually going to happen. So it's always scurrying to protect against all possible contingencies.

Y'know, for just in case.

While meanwhile, existence is like, "Ok, cue the surprise flat tire."

As it happens, we've actually never been anything*other* than helpless anyway. Seen or not, admitted or not, understood or not...

We are experts in not knowing.

So there's actually nothing unknown or new about being helpless. It is already the case.

And here we are, carrying on carrying on.

Until it's time to *not* go on, of course. And we are not the boss of when that is.

So sure, the mind can busy itself trying to control the future. But it does not actually have that power.

Luckily, the future is a sheep in wolf's clothing anyway.

It looks scary but it's not real. And neither is the self that is looking to be protected.

They're both completely made up. As concepts always are.

Nice lambie. Nice lambie.

Meanwhile, oh to be able to go back in time and say once more to my sweet friend, "Those fears of the future- the "potential" poverty, the "could happen" mistakes, the "might happen" suffering… they're imagination. They're not real. The future isn't real. So maybe this right now can be enough?"

I would so wish for her to be able to enjoy this anything-but-poor present, while it's here.

And of course, I can't bring her back to say any of that.

So I'm saying it to you.

Because I wish this for you too- the noticing of your own part in this sweet present existence, as it is.

Surely that counts at least as much as all those imagined, fictitious maybe-might-could-happens.

Not to mention that when I share this with you, I'm sharing with her too.

And thank you for that.

"You need not strain towards the future- the future will come to you on its own."

~Nisargadatta

REALITY?

March 5, 2019

"Reality can neither be proved nor disproved. Within the mind you cannot, beyond the mind you need not. In the real, the question ‘what is real?' does not arise."

~Nisargadatta

Reality.

We all know what it is. We all know it when we see it.

Duh. Not much question there.

But even if weirdly, incomprehensibly, we somehow *didn't* know what's real, all we'd have to do is look around and see where large numbers of other people agree. That would prove it for sure.

Or at least appear to.

Maybe reality is a numbers game.

Although... lots of folks say they see the sky. Do those numbers mean the sky is actually a real thing?

Besides, people who don't agree with us *also* think they've got reality on their side. You only have to look at politics to see this in action. Or on Facebook, in any Enlightenment group.

So what's the deal? I mean, things are real or they aren't, no? Shouldn't this be un-debatable?

Well, maybe we could sort this out by noticing what we depend on to know what's real.

Well, there's *our*feelings. *Our* thoughts. Sensation in *our* fingers. Colors and shapes in *our* eyes. Sounds happening in *our* ears.

Noticing a pattern?

They're all ways to describe the true favorite for knowing what's real: Personal Experience.

Y'know, that never-biased, never wildly-skewed, always totally trustable source we can unfailingly depend on for truth.

Meanwhile, what's the actual common denominator?

Us.

There's no way to find reality unless it passes through the Me fulcrum. Without the Me, it's… nothing.

Uh oh.

Turns out Reality is not static, not set in stone. It's actually very variable, very person-al.

Turns out there's no way to know *anything* outside one's own senses and experience, which are limited, narrow, biased, and have absolutely no idea about "reality."

That makes everything ME-ality, not reality.

It's not "things as they actually exist," as Merriam-Webster defines it, but instead, "things as the ME experiences them".

Which are not even close to being the same thing.

Now, this might seem alarming to those who like to have some certainty.

Because let's face it, without a sure sense of what's real, how can we tell what anything is? How can we know right, wrong, good, bad? How can we know the difference between what's true vs a made-up cockamamie point of view?

Well, exactly.

We can't.

Which is why those questions have driven mankind crazy for thousands of years.

There's simply no peace there.

So instead, maybe we can notice the amazingness of seeing that there's nothing real without little ol' us.

Existence, perception, reality, experience…

They are all us.

Experience depends on us.

Talk about powerful. Talk about important. Talk about special.

And once the mind gets over the idea that there is no solid and magical reality-land where everything is real and solid and certain and right…

There can be an immediate shift, if one is open to it.

Things can get more diffuse. Less centered, less locatable.

Ironically, the Me becomes less important, not more.

Ironically, when it's seen that there is nothing outside of the Me experience, the sense of Me begins to dissipate.

And as it happens, that very realization is what so many lovely Mind-Tickler readers have been seeking for a very long time.

There it is.

Right there, in our own fingertips.

Right there- our own world. Our own viewpoint. Our own rules.

I mean…

Who needs more reality than that?

"People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do."

~Isaac Asimov

ENLIGHTENMENT, ANYONE?

March 12, 2019

"The self-styled gurus talk of ripeness and effort, of merits and achievements; these are mere mental formations, projections of an addicted mind. Instead of helping, they obstruct."

~Nisargadatta

They insist it's rare, this awakening thing. It's an achievement only for the very lucky few.

Kind of like the 1%. Not available to the unwashed masses.

They also insist there are levels of attainment, stages. It's a process, a journey. It leads somewhere. You might arrive temporarily, but you're not there yet.

In fact, you never really do get there, do you? There's always more to get.

There's Right Effort, and rules to be followed. Enlightenment takes discipline.

Better get to work.

And make no mistake, it *is* work. You have to turn inward, ask the questions, do the mediation, the inquiry, the reading, the satsangs.

Do it right, or no soup for you.

And then surely that hard work will be rewarded, right? Whooo hoo! Transformation! Shift! Healing! Dissolving! Transmuting, for gosh sake.

Although… some folks have been working hard for decades and still this special experience eludes them. Well, they're obviously just doing things wrong. Too bad for them.

Naturally *you* want to travel this path extra-correctly. Because you really want to attain this magic.

Though it is kind of confusing exactly how to do that.

Especially when so many seemingly-successful attainers didn't do all that work; they just woke up one morning and *bam*.

Ramana: "It was quite sudden."
Adya: "All of a sudden…"
Jeff Foster: "Suddenly and without warning…"
Eckhart Tolle: "I woke up and suddenly realized…"
Francis Lucille: "This event, or more precisely, this nonevent, stands alone, uncaused."

Um… *uncaused?*

Aw hell.

What's a non-awake, non-shifted, still-on-the-path person supposed to do with *uncaused?*

Do being the operative word.

Because after the fact, these teachers have come up with insights and meditations and inquiries that you are supposed to *work at*, in order to experience what happened to *them, suddenly.*

Which brings the question, is it possible to see through the self by giving it tasks, assignments, goals?

I mean, people sure are working very hard to get this thing.

Though the idea that we can get it, turns consciousness into just another small object that big-important-us can catch and hold on to, if only we have

the right mitt and the right method. Not to mention infinite patience.

And by trying to make awakening happen with the power of our actions, we get to pretend we're far more influential than we are.

While the reductionist, objectifying mind makes up journeys and levels, in order to appear like it contains incomprehensible Vastness.

Rather than the other way around.

With tales of attainment and paths and shifts, the mind attempts to reduce VASTness to a size it can handle.

Instead of seeing that, if anything, consciousness contains mind. And us. And our experiences.

Including awakening.

So there's no need to go looking for it- it's present, always here, always has been.

And when we can try on the possibility that we're experience itself, rather than the experience-*er,* well…

The sense of Me- that separate, achieving, goal-oriented object… lightens.

Without attaining levels. Without a process. Without a journey.

Experiencing is happening. Seeing is happening, feeling is happening, thinking is happening. We are consciousness seeing, consciousness feeling, consciousness thinking.

There is no shift.

It's not rare.

We are… all of us… already Everything.

Welcome to enlightenment, where we've been all along.

"Unless you make tremendous efforts, you will not be convinced that effort will take you nowhere."

~Nisargadatta

GETTING PERSONAL

March 19, 2019

"You probably think this song is about you, don't you, don't you, don't you?"

~Carly Simon

My friend is depressed. And anxious. Some days it can feel false to smile, it's hard to function, and just getting out of bed is a challenge.

She thinks she's a loser. She thinks she's wasting her life. She thinks she should have a partner, more friends, get more done. She thinks she should stop all addictions, and get more healthy. She should help people, and have an impact on the world.

Watching, evaluating, monitoring herself.

Obviously there's some flaw in her, something wrong with her, which makes it impossible to have a good life.

So of course it's up to her to fix it.

She really should do that ASAP.

Although it's not as if she hasn't tried. She's done the meditating, the inquiries, the self-help, therapy, affirmations, retreats. All that going inward and sitting-with the pain, allowing it- she's done that up the wazoo.

Shouldn't she know better by now? Well, actually, she *does* know better. And yet, here it is anyway- this wrong life, these wrong feelings.

This should not be happening.

Sound familiar? What, you thought it was just you?

In my work with clients, I hear some version of these kinds of things all day, every day. In fact, such thoughts and feelings are so common, repeated so often…

It's almost like there's a script or something.

A script for suffering? No, no, no, weird Mind-Tickler-writer-person, that can't be right.

Although…. If any of these thoughts *do* sound familiar, then they can't be just one person's property, can they?

If they appear to a whole lot of other heads, then they "belong to" a whole lot of people.

Like, pretty much everyone.

I mean, it could well be that the mind is simply like an old LP on repeat, happily focused on the Me Me Me, and on flaws, and failures, and not-enoughs, and too-muches.

Maybe it all boils down to mind happily singing its me-centered song.

Just to have something to do.

And then we go and think, "Oh look at this evidence that I'm all messed up. This is all about meeee."

Sort of like, "I feel, therefore I exist."

Taking it very personally. Even though that doesn't feel at all good.

Meanwhile, there's so much evidence that these very same thoughts and feelings have been swirling through and around billions of heads since mankind could speak words.

Which would make depression not personal, and anxiety not personal…

and none of it meaning anything at all about any one individual person.

As in, nothing to do with us.

Well. That might feel better.

It certainly lets us off the hook. After all, there's simply no need to fix property that isn't ours.

And then, feelings like those labeled "depression" or "anxiety" could be free to come and go, blow in and blow out.

Without occupying huge chunks of our attention. Without activating the solution-finding apparatus.

Which would mean the same feelings and experiences could still happen, only with much less urgency, much less importance, much less heaviness.

They could be seen to be….

Just feelings.

Just thoughts.

Here, sometimes.

Not here, other times.

Ah.

Next.

"The separate self by definition is seeking happiness. It believes it can make things happen. Its search for happiness creates unhappiness."

~Rupert Spira

VALIDATING YOU

March 26, 2019

"Living, dying, smiling, crying -- one Self experienced as many selves."

~Adyashanti

Validation.

Why yes, please. And thank you.

We want it, love it, need it. It makes us warm and fuzzy, connected, understood, less alone.

Validation means we are in this together.

And of course, being individuals, we want that.

So getting someone else to say, "Oh I get you! You're great! I share your experience!" feels necessary.

Although scoring some validation does require Others who step up and do their part.

After all, it's not enough to carefully curate, package and polish this presentation of self just for ourselves. We need someone else to take us in, hear us out, share the experience. We need an audience to see it, like it, and buy into the tale we're serving up.

Otherwise, without another person absorbing and taking in this self's experience, there's not much validating happening.

Of course that authentication of our experience gets us absolutely nothing real.

And of course that verification of self is pretty much the opposite of what all those years of enlightenment-seeking were supposed to attain.

Still, if, "I feel your pain" actually succeeded in achieving contentment, then the Mind-Tickler would whole-heartedly say, yay!

But the self, whatever it is, has never been satisfied with the validation it has gotten. The longing for endorsement is usually pretty much bottomless. We get a little, it feels nice for a while, and then soon enough, we want more again.

Which makes sense. Because really, how can corroboration of our selves ever come from any external Others?

Especially since those others are also seeking corroboration of their selves.

Here we are imagining that others, separate from us, hold something we need, and that we'll be more complete if only they'll give us that something.

Meanwhile they don't have it either, and are also trying to get it for themselves.

So fine. Maybe this is mixed up because validation is supposed to come from inside us, as opposed to from outside.

As in, let's ask mind or self to validate itself.

Hmm, can you say, "Fox in the henhouse?"

Because it's unlikely that the self has any desire to see outside itself.

I mean, how would that even work, exactly? Just like eyes can't see outside of eyes, because they're limited by themselves…

Mind/self can't see outside of itself; it's limited by itself.

And yet we do still want to be validated, approved-of, connected. After all, it feels good.

Yes, apparently validation is like having a glass of wine and some sex. It feels pretty good. And then it's over.

And the self, with great satisfaction, smokes a cigarette.

Because validation and approval-seeking hold the story of self in place.

Validation equals confirmation. Confirmed selves feels real. Confirmed others feel real.

Mission accomplished.

So yes the self loves others thinking it's great and validating it.

Which is why all our constant monitoring for how others react to us, is entirely to find out if we're pulling off the show.

"How am I doing? Are they buying it?"

That's all the search for validation, approval and appreciation is about.

A story of a person, a story of other persons, the maintenance and presentation of an image.

Luckily, blessedly, images have no need of validation.

And neither does any thing else.

Including whatever watches the show, sees the pictures, loves this play,

And never gets tired of watching it,

Over and over again.

"Consciousness finds only itself."

~Rupert Spira

SPACE

April 2, 2019

"No thing comes into existence. Knowledge of the world outside of Consciousness, made out of stuff called ‘matter', is a kind of ignorance."

~Rupert Spira

Science: "If you took out all of the space in our atoms, the entire human race (all 7 billion of us) would fit into the volume of a sugar cube. 99.99% of the human body is completely empty." **

Humans: "Yeah yeah, ok, but what about *Meee*?"

Let's face it, humans are kind of obsessed with the Meee, aren't we?

I mean, look at us. Single-mindedly focused on, and circling relentlessly, monitoring, watching, figuring out, analyzing, advising, critiquing, and correcting our self...

Even though it's empty.

Making it better, making it right, making it happy, making it enlightened. Making it think right, be good, be kind, be special. There are shoulds and shouldn'ts and rights and wrongs and likes and dislikes and wants.

Whew. This emptiness sure has a lot of opinions and obligations.

Maybe all that obsessing is hopefully intended to *fill up*that space.

Because as far as our attention goes, how Meee is doing and what it experiences are the very center of the universe.

We've focused day and night on no-thing as if it's some-thing.

Who knew empty space could be so Self centered?

While meanwhile, it remains nothing.

Which perhaps explains how we may feel "empty" sometimes. Because as-if, aka make-believe, is not very filling, not very satisfying.

We're left wanting more. And we want *a lot* of more.

More solidity, more realness, more groundedness, more authenticity, more intensity, more pleasure, more food, love, sex, wine, money.

In fact humans are so eager to fill up all that Empty that we even want more of*that*. As in, more emptiness, more enlightenment, more spaciousness, more awareness, more peace, more truth.

Anything will do, as long as it's more.

Meee wants it.

Which might make us wonder, being 99.99% empty already, what exactly is this Mee that wants so darn much?

I mean, it's space. We'll never get more of what we are already.

Emptiness can't get more empty.

It can't fill up, either, no matter how hard we try.

See, because it's *nothing*.It's empty.

Still, with all this obsessing, we might begin to see why some humans go and get busy searching for True Nature.

"Non-object-empty-space seeks solidity, definition, and realness. Intense non-stop attention on itself required. Enlightenment a bonus. Apply within."

Perhaps this is why spiritual folks have been trying to define and locate this True-Nature thing for such a long time.

And also why it has not been so easily found.

It's not easy to find nothing.

Especially when nothing is what's doing the looking.

Because despite all the attempts at centering the self, we're not objects in the space.

We *are* the space.

No center point. Not locatable. Outside same as inside. All one, etc etc.

We're experience. We're nothing. The self is not there.

Which means there's no True Nature to be found, there's no need to find one, and there's nothing looking for it.

And no amount of obsession or want or meditation or navel-gazing will change that.

Not that there's anything wrong with any of this. Obsessing about the Meee and what it is or isn't, or looking for solidity, answers, enlightenment, or spaciousness- these are all as good things to do with these lives as anything else.

There's no right way for space to be nothing.

So if humans work hard to convince ourselves that we are real objects, rather than unlocatable nothingness itself...

If we really want to believe, "We're here, we matter, we're significant, we're *some*thing,..."

If we really really want the Meee to mean something, to be real, to be better, to be enlightened...

OK. Why not?

We're still nothing.

Obsessed or not.

Getting-it or not.

Seeking or not.

Still

99.99%

()

"Nothing: something that does not exist. No thing.

Space: a continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied."

~Merriam-Webster

SPIRITUAL IDOLS

April 9, 2019

"Do not make for yourself an idol."

~God

On non-dual sites and pages and groups everywhere, there's frequently wordy discussion about how we're nothing and there's no self and it's all illusion and all a dream.

And then in the next breath, the very same folks pounding their not-there fists in certitude, fervently extoll the virtues of their favorite Teacher.

There's a whole lotta worshipping going on in our spiritual worlds.

Downright idolatry, often.

There's feet kissing and eye-gazing and lining-up for intense hugs. There's spiritual tourism to India, trekking to sit for a few minutes in a long-dead Wise One's cave.

As if the cave contains that Teacher's magic, which is apparently stuck in there and unable to be transmitted to some fluffier location such as, say, Poughkeepsie.

But I digress.

There's huggy, smiley selfies taken with the admired Teacher after satsang, complete with held-up autographed book, soon to become proud profile pictures.

There are even literal altars- dedicated spaces carved out in tiny living spaces- with photos of the Revered One along with crystals, prayer candles, various talismans and statues of the Buddha.

All of which seems kind of weird.

If only because a picture of Ramana or Amma or Parmahansa XYZ is not what those sages are or ever were.

Pictures and altars and books are symbols- substitutes for something else- maybe a longing for oneness.

Though oneness can't be experienced or recognized via symbols. Representations are a step removed from the "real." That creates the appearance of two, not one.

Which every good non-dualist knows is the opposite of what is being sought.

Besides, if we're not-a-self, then these same Teachers are also not selves, also not there, also illusion.

So who or what is being worshipped, and by whom?

Not that any of this is the end of the world, or even a problem. I mean, jeez, let us adore happily away in peace. Seems harmless enough.

It's just that, when we idealize the Teacher- who is after all human just like us- we're pretty much missing the point their teachings are supposedly intended to pass along in the first place.

We're actually missing what we've been seeking all these years.

The story of the wise Other, the Not-Me, who has Something that we don't, pulls attention to the guru as the Provider of answers, connection and love, creates a sense of Them and Not-Them (aka us),

And solidifies the individual's already pervasive sense of lack, missing something, and needing improvement.

Idolization of teachers anchors the sense of self.

This is probably not what any acolyte wants or seeks.

Perhaps a bit less harmless though, is that teacher idealization causes us to miss that we already have, and already are, exactly what we're hoping to find in this Other.

Which means the sought is not in the Other.

It's not over there.

It's here. It's us.

We're the love for them and the feelings of missing something and the thoughts and the images and the selfies and the wisdom.

We're Them. We're It.

What we've been looking for in teachers, has been here, as us, all along.

So we're not lacking.

What we seek is already ours. No one else is needed to provide it.

Which is good.

Because there is no one else.

Buddha statue optional.

"A yearning arises,
To find oneness through another.
The search continues for an anchor."

~Anonymous

AM I RIGHT?

April 16, 2019

"People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do."

~Isaac Asimov

Everybody thinks they're right.

Everybody.

And pretty much everybody hangs out only with others who *agree* that they're right.

I mean, there will probably never be a whole lot of Fox News watchers sitting around laughing with AOC and buying her a brewsky. There will probably never be a whole lot of political far-righters with much love in their hearts or even just tolerance for liberals. And vice versa, thank you very much.

There will probably never be a whole lot of spiritual fundamentalists- y'know, those, "*You gotta work at it all your life to attain enlightenment*" types- inviting the "*This is it, no effort is needed*," folks to tea.

No, we humans prefer to gather only people who are our version of right around us. Teams are chosen. Sides are drawn.

So when the waters mix and we somehow end up smack up against someone who is wrong, well…

Outrage runs high. Things get heated. Wrong-Siders get blocked, denied access, cut out of lives. Names get called.

Which is where things get kind of odd. Because, especially in politics but also in spirituality….

The names we call the other side are the exact same names the other side calls *us*.

"You're a Nazi!" "No you are!" "No you are!" "You're uncaring, stupid, cold-hearted, and ignorant! You're a know-it-all who knows nothing!" "Oh yeah? I know you are, but what am I?"

Yeah. It isn't pretty.

We choose a side, we know who we are, we know where we belong. And then someone comes along and loudly challenges that carefully-constructed reality.

And we are not amused.

Luckily for our points of view, agitation binds us together. Being on a side, any side, enables certainty that we know who, what and where we are. We know where we stand.

Which of course implies there's a Me standing *somewhere*.

And that's the point.

Good enough, that'll do.

Because opinion and rightness and fury at wrongness and gathering the like-minded around us maintains the sense of self- the only thing these personalities actually really care about anyway.

Identity.

"I am a liberal, I am a conservative, I am an evangelist, a neo-advaitist, a Workie, a Sedona-Method-er."

"I am one of *them,*not one of *them*."

Definition. Labels. Certainty. Confirmation, agreement, and the appearance of something real.

Opinion confirms the self.

We likey.

Though sadly this corroborated, supposedly-real thing is wispy and therefore easily threatened. Which is why it needs protection, defense, anger and pounding fists.

So yes the level of anger is high. Because the level of fear is high.

Open minds are threatening to the self. Disagreement is threatening to the self. Either can reveal how gauzy this self-thing actually is.

So we will permit only input that confirms our bias, our point of view, our Selves. We will reject everything and everyone who doesn't serve that mission. We'll roll our eyes, change the channel, throw out the book, and hit the block button on all disagree-ers.

We will protect that tender little self-story and make it feel safe, dammit.

Even though it's just a concept and doesn't actually need protection.

So... will all this rage and divisiveness ever stop?

Will the personality suddenly decide, "Oh, that right-wing Nazi-sympathizer in the white hood over there looks like such a lovely person; I'll just set aside my urge for like-mindedness and Self protection and go over and shake his gentlemanly hand?"

Uh, no.

There will not be peace, love and flower-sharing throughout the divided lands.

The Self is far too tenuous to risk being that porous and open to difference.

So for now we'll just have to expect more anger, more hostility, more Self protection. And like mankind has done for thousands upon thousands of years, we'll find a way to live with the war and separation that comes with.

That's the game here.

It will be played.

At least for now, anyway.

Am I right?

Who's with me?

Go, team.

"There is no right and wrong, no better or worse. Truth isn't good and delusion isn't evil. No one is ahead or behind. All is vanity. All."

~Jed McKenna

PEOPLE HURT

April 23, 2019

"There's something deep inside of us that actually wants to suffer, that indulges in suffering. ...because through suffering we can continue to hold onto everything that we think is true."

~Adyashanti

There's a whole lot of depression, anxiety and anger out there. People suffer. People hurt.

I don't need to tell you this. You're a people. You know.

You also know there's a whole lot of advice, method and blather about how to handle said suffering. Most adults who hurt like this have already tried many approaches and finally landed on one they rely on.

Whether it "works" or not.

Because look around and you might see that some very hotly-foisted, "No, that's just wrong!" opinions about depression and anxiety come from people who are… still depressed and anxious.

And just like every religious or political side-taker, they block, they unsubscribe, they suggest books and podcasts that offer the proper (aka their) way of dealing with pain.

Which is kind of too bad, really. Because fresh ideas are not a bad thing. 'Specially since they're no thing at all.

Meanwhile, what all experiencers of bad feelings have in common is the desire to describe how hard things are.

Like, non-stop.

Because let's face it, we humans love to narrate, analyze and think about how we feel. Especially how bad we feel.

Now granted this discussion may not be out-loud. But whether silent or spoken, the commentary runs.

"I'm so anxious. This is crazy, this is awful. Can't shake it. Too hard. It's heavy, squeezing my chest, contracting. Feels like I'm dying. Always there, been like this for years, getting worse. I can't take it. Gotta make this stop. Don't think I can go on."

While going on. And on.

If we have to go out, we ache to get home, back into bed, so we can continue the ongoing mental summation about how awful we feel.

"How can I leave home when this black cloud is with me? This isn't right, this isn't normal. I can't wait to get out of here. I'm a fraud, pretending not to suffer. THEY are not hurting. It's me, damaged, broken. Too hard to hide. Feels so bad. I want out."

Or, when we do talk about it out-loud, all we want is someone to sit still and listen. To us. While we pour our pain into their waiting receptacle. We want empathic nods. We want, "There there honey, I hear you, I'm so sorry, yes that's awful." We want validation.

Of a feeling we hate. Of a feeling we ourselves want gone.

But sure let's validate it.

Of course none of this is to say we shouldn't talk about how we feel. Talking is fine. Pouring is fine. And of course I'm not unsympathetic. I spent much of my life depressed and anxious- I do get it and there there honey, I really am with you.

It's just all that allowing and endless describing and nonstop narration has perhaps made our suffering so comfy, so loved, that like a teenager in the basement…

it simply has no reason to move out.

All those words constantly itemizing how we feel are like putting a pin in a butterfly.

It can't fly off.

We won't shut up long enough to let it.

So perhaps we actually love the pain we claim to hate.

Now I realize this might not be what you want to hear. It might even be completely infuriating. "There's no way I like this pain! Shut up Judy!" As you reach for the opt-out link.

I get it. The thing is, before you go, maybe you'd be willing to try something.

Maybe try feeling the feeling without all the commentary about it, without all the blow-by-blow of what it feels like.

Maybe see what happens to hard feelings when you remove the labels ("I'm depressed!") and the wordy repetitive chronicling of heaviness, or meaning, or forever-ness, or past trauma.

Maybe explore what happens to a feeling when it's actually, simply, felt, instead of described.

If you can. It's easier said than done.

Because after lifetimes of indulging the narrative and pinning the feeling down, it is not necessarily easy to unpin.

It can be done though, and if you can slow the reporting for even just a bit, you might be amazed to find that that familiar, despised feeling kind of

goes…

Poof.

And floats off.

All by itself.

Leaving space, quiet, stillness.

Without having to inquire, realize or understand. Without having to sit-with, validate or indulge.

I mean you can do all that. But you probably won't want to.

Because once you see how airy and vaporous feelings really are,

And how all the language is what is holding them here...

You might no longer want to discuss them ad nauseam.

Which just might feel…

Pretty darn good.

"Let everything happen to you.
Beauty and terror.
Just keep going.
No feeling is final."

~Rainer Maria Rilke

SILENCE!

April 30, 2019

"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth."

~Lao Tzu

Most of us know that the mind keeps babbling a steady nonstop stream of words.

Perhaps that's one reason why silence is so highly esteemed in the non-dual world.

And yet weirdly, so many teachers and wanna-be teachers go on...

and on...

and on...

about everything, including silence.

Every day a new 38-paragraph discourse.

So. Many. Words.

Isn't it weird that many exhorters who tell us, "*Remain silent*," have so dang much to say?

As if, if they just keep typing, they might drag their readers into enlightenment by sheer exhaustion, wearing us down syllable by syllable.

Or as if, if they just keep typing, readers might be fooled into thinking there's something in all those words.

Instead of *nothing* in all those words. About silence.

Maybe some of these Sages might try taking their own advice. If only because long treatises are pretty much contradictory to what they're supposedly espousing.

So when they go on and on, maybe they're revealing that they don't have themselves that which they're trying to sell.

Since anything truly understood can probably be said concisely.

Meanwhile all that wordiness is like a curtain. What's behind it is still there. But the curtain may well block the view.

Which is why, if what we're after is enlightenment, words are not helpful. They obscure. They obstruct. They deceive. Language is dualistic-separating from experience.

So it's possible that silence, realization, enlightenment, may not be transmittable, or attainable, via words.

Though of course we can't do without language at this point in our species' evolution. We wouldn't even want to; we need it.

But when we're talking about consciousness or awareness or enlightenment, we might have a very different experience…

If only we could just zip it for a while.

Because all those words anchor down the self.

After all, if mental, written and oral descriptions could be set aside, what might be left?

If we could feel without describing, act without analysis, experience without evaluating good or bad…

Without all the blah-blah of *what I'm thinking* and *what I'm feeling* and *what should happen* and *what is right or wrong*…

What would happen to the sense of self?

Would there be a center-point, an I, a Me, a You, without words?

How would we know?

And therein lies something many Mind-Tickler readers have been looking for, for a very long time.

So if enlightenment is wanted, we might try setting the words aside once in a while.

All of them.

We might try experiencing without talking *about* it.

Even to ourselves. Especially to ourselves.

Now of course this is not easy, which is why I say, "*Try*."

Luckily just the attempt can prove mighty interesting.

Though granted, this non-word-experiencing might not produce Great Impressive Books and Important Lengthy Posts and Explaining-Enlightenment Discourses on Facebook.

Still, *being* doesn't need to be described.

And the silence, the space in and around all the wordy narratives…

Might make the exact same existence…

Be experienced very differently.

And *that* just might speak…

For itself.

OUT OF THE BLUE

May 21, 2019

"There is no one who can resist what happens in this universe."

~Colette Kelso

Ready?

Fall in love. Right now.

Make yourself like a food you hate.

Intentionally send those panic attacks and depressions packing. Yes, you've probably tried to control feelings a few zillion times before, but surely this time will be the charm.

No?

Ok then, bring up ideas, answers and solutions to whatever issues are happening, right now. Make creativity happen.

Or, try not having thoughts. (For those lovely readers who think they don't have thoughts anymore, read this sentence again, slowly. Unless you're in a coma, in which case you get a pass.)

Or, make enlightenment come. Don't dilly-dally; do it now. I mean, it does seem to come when it pleases, or not at all, or even to those, maybe even especially to those, who have never done any meditation, inquiry or satsang.

But still, go for it.

Or, make life come, whether it wants to or not.

Or eat kale, work out, don't smoke, and cross fingers that death doesn't feel like dropping by anyway.

See just how in-charge you really are.

Oh, humans. Such adorably arrogant little things.

So certain that health won't be gained, jobs won't be scored, money won't come, enlightenment won't show up, unless we take charge and make it all happen.

So certain that consequences are a result of our actions.

So certain of our power.

Never mind the complete lack of evidence of said power.

Because when we pay attention to what actually happens vs. what we want to happen, it becomes pretty clear…

That everything comes out of the blue.

Preferences come out of the blue, solutions come out of the blue, love comes out of the blue, life and death come out of the blue.

Thank goodness.

Because if we're depending on ourselves and these minds to run things, well…

Look what we're counting on to make things right, or to make things better.

I mean what are the odds that the mind… scared, mean, lying, doom-predicting mind… knows how or even wants to do that?

In fact, right about now it might even be alarmed or irritated by this particular Tickle-topic.

No worries though, mind; it's OK. You're OK. Plan and meditate and take action to your heart's content.

Why not?

After all, the idea to Do Something! comes from out of the blue too.

It's just that there's a lot of peace in seeing that there is a bigger-than-us Blue.

And that it's got ideas, it's got solutions, it's got, "Wow who could have seen THAT coming?"s.

Way more than we have.

Which means maybe we can take a break from the great big job of trying to run existence.

Who knows? We might discover that even on driver's-seat vacay, things get done, feelings come and go, pounds come off. Anyway.

Though of course there's no problem if we do continue to oppose existence and try to impose our will and direction on it.

After all, The Blue doesn't need us to step aside or yield power. It does its thing whether we fight it or not.

Y'know, being the true boss and all.

Besides, we can't control the belief that we have control, either.

It's just that delusions of control actually control... nothing.

And feel simply awful.

So maybe we've had enough.

Or not.

Even that's not up to us.

And does or doesn't come, on its own time and direction,

From out of the blue.

"All practices are like
Painting a rose so that
It will smell better."

~Wu Hsin

SPIRITUAL JARGON

June 4, 2019

"Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas."

~The Crown Prince Manjushri

It might be hard to imagine...

but every once in a while someone complains that The Mind-Tickler has nothing of value to offer, because it is written with light, everyday language.

Rather than with the kinds of ponderously serious words that more-typically couch conversations about non-duality, consciousness and awareness.

Y'know, the kinds of words this subject matter clearly requires. The kinds of words that enlighten just by reading them.

Those kinds of words.

Which is why today, just for balance, The Mind-Tickler will be brought to you by the Non-Dual Jargon Association.

Herewith, some random quotes from various sources, some very well known, though unattributed so you can receive them with an open mind.

We shall cross fingers that just reading this properly-written material, as opposed to the usual mind-tickles, will bring about that long-sought-after shift.

Here goes.

"When one Awakens unto Pure Awareness, one Awakens unto the Presence of Pure Awareness – Now. Such Presence is of Pure Awareness, not of Mind, and Pure Awareness is what is Aware."

"Having become non-dual with respect to awareness and the Clear, ie awareClear, one becomes non-dual with respect to awareClear and appearances of whatever nature."

"When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two."

Want more? Of course you do! The desire for this stuff is apparently unlimited in the spiritual community.

"The recognition of clear awareness as our own essence informs our pursuit of practices in the gradual cultivation of our being… We arrive at rest in the non-dual wholeness of awareness. Purity of being, awareness, promotes the purification of our will, the letting go of attachments and egoism."

"Being is the consummate absence that is beyond measure."

"Ultimate Clarity only occurs when attachments to ANY and ALL concepts that arise in Consciousness are completely done away, and in that vacuum or space… Pure Awareness IS."

*"*The experience* of *being* enlightened courses through one's body of awareness."*

"To be Present in Consciousness is not to be separate from that which arises in Consciousness, but is to be Present in All that appears in Consciousness. Presence must accompany that which arises in Consciousness for Conscious Awareness to occur."

"*My ego was gone- there was just me there*."

"*Awareness is Aware*."

OK! Got it?

Feeling awareClear yet? Is the cognized, cognized?

Sure, sure.

Now, I'm not saying that any of this is right or wrong.

It's just that, from here, all that gobble-de-gook passing for communication sure seems like obfuscation.

It sure seems possible that all those almost-nonsensical strung-together words just maybe... just might... maintain the sense of seeking and finding the self.

Instead of setting folks free of it. Instead of enabling the enlightenment that people are bothering with all those words for in the first place.

Because jargon interferes. Jargon obscures. Jargon categorizes, distances, eliminates, and encloses in small, Right-Way boxes.

Which happens to be the opposite of mind-opening awareness.

But hey, what do I know?

Nisargadatta I ain't.

Still, there you go, hopefully feeling wiser for all those quotes.

You're welcome.

May you rest in non-dual beingness.

May you shift into, and abide in, blissful everlasting awareness.

May perpetual, not-affected-by-outside-circumstances peace be with you.

Oh and love! Let's not forget love- our True Nature!

Oh! And the force- let the force be with you too, while we're at it.

OK.

Yeah.

That's all the words I got.

"All this profound talk is nothing but mental entertainment. 'I Am' is again entertainment. All my talks are conceptual entertainment."

~Nisargadatta

GOING SMALL

June 11, 2019

"People are suffering and dying under the torture of the fantasy self they're failing to become."

~Will Storr

There are really only a few reasons why anyone gives a darn about attaining enlightenment.

1- They think it's the right thing to do- something that is supposed to be done, if they are to live properly. Kind of like joining the military because one wants to be a good citizen and thinks it's the right hting to do. This is the Following the Rules of Living Right motive.

2- They think there's some wonderful experience out there that they're missing out on, some amazing bit of chocolate they haven't tasted that everyone else is raving about. We can call this one the FOMO reason for seeking enlightenment.

3- They want to feel better, and not be anxious, not be depressed, not react in the face of triggers. This is the Blissful Despite Any Circumstances reason.

By far, motive-for-enlightenment #3 is the most common. It's the reason why people ask spiritual teachers what their life is like behind the scenes. The seeker is asking if the enlightenment magic actually succeeds in allowing the teacher to feel good all the time.

Often if the answer is not satisfactorily encouraging, the seeker will move on to another teacher, one hopefully with more effective magic.

Because basically humans just want to feel good. All. The. Time.

And regardless of the merits of feeling only one thing, most people very much want this.

So when folks focus on the grand, the vast, the bigness of enlightenment, when what is desired is actually quite small, well, we can see how they may be looking for answers in the wrong direction. We can see how they might not attain what they spend decades trying to get. Simply because it's not where they are looking for it.

So in the interests of helping some actually get what they want, today's Mind-Tickler looks at the small, instead of the incomprehensibly large.

Let's play with one single, particular thought.

Which is about as small as things can get. After all, "nothing", which is what thought is, is pretty dang small.

So which thought is so common, so basic, so micro-fast and usually unseen, yet appears to influence so many 'bad' feelings?

Which thought, in some version or combination or words, actually brings the pain so many seekers are trying to escape via perpetual bliss?

Let's call it out into the light.

Because so much depression, so much anxiety, so much guilt, shame and lack of okness, boils down to the few words that indicate...

"I'm not doing this right."

There's personal failure in those words. There's fault in those words. There's blame, guilt, helplessness and just plain badness in those words.

There's self in those words.

And whether the words are exactly these, or "I'm bad, I'm wrong" or something like, they bring attention...

Right to the self.

As the center of all things.

Which always feels awful. Though as a strategy for the perpetuation of suffering, there's none better.

I mean, we certainly can't ignore the feelings that come with all that self-centeredness.

So we have to get busy trying to make them go away.

Enter the enlightenment search.

When maybe we would do better to notice how much of our pain is driven by this thought.

Instead of chasing the sky.

Luckily, simply noticing can shift things. Simply noticing how this thought lurks under every bad feeling, every panic attack, every depression, every too-many-chips, every week spent on the couch trying to force ourselves to get up and do something- can shift things.

It can even shift the enlightenment search itself.

After all, what would happen to the yearning for enlightenment if the thought, "I'm not doing this right," didn't exist?

There'd be no need for it.

There'd be no need for the bad feelings that come when we think we're not doing the enlightenment search right, either.

Now maybe you're thinking, "No no no, this is stupid and wrong, Mind-Tickler! One thought can't be the cause of all this suffering." Or maybe it

seems like nothing this simple can be helpful.

And hey, what do I know, maybe you're right.

What I do know is this:

Despite all the inquiry and therapy and medication and meditation and satsangs and podcasts and Facebook consciousness groups and prayer and affirmations and manifesting...

There are still so many folks- possibly even you - who remain anxious, depressed, compulsive, unmotivated.

Tracking this thought may be the one thing that hasn't been tried.

And wouldn't it be something if we actually could experience a peace anyway, and a lighter grasp on the need to have only the right outside circumstances...

Without having to sit in every satsang or read every spiritual book and quote known to man...

For decades.

I mean, wouldn't it paradoxically be something,

To actually attain the peace so long sought, so long desired,

At last,

By going small instead of big.

"Spiritual awakening is the difficult process whereby the increasing realization that everything is as wrong as it can be flips suddenly into the realization that everything is as right as it can be."

~Alan Watts

SHAME

June 18, 2019

"There is a sensation, and you say that you are depressed or unhappy or blissful, jealous, greedy, envious. This labeling brings into existence the one who is translating this sensation."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

Years ago while in an important business meeting, crowded with higher-ups, a client laughed at a joke. Which caused her to let loose... a fart. A loud, un-ignorable one.

Telling the story all this time later, her face still turns red.

Another friend wanted to impress someone, and in front of him she tripped and tumbled into a puddle, ending up covered head to toe in mud. She impressed him alright.

Another friend did a TV interview and suddenly her old stutter came back. Live. With hundreds of thousands of people watching,

Oh the shame.

The bad skin, the freckles, the excess body hair in weird places. The buttons opened, the zipper down, the dress hiked up. Clapping alone and calling "Bravo!" when the concert isn't over. Saying ‘Love you!' instead of "See ya!" to a stranger. Spectacularly missing the ball when the whole team is watching and counting on you to win the game.

Who hasn't experienced stories like this? No one that's who.

And what do these stories all have in common?

I mean, besides the why-isn't-the-ground-swallowing-me-right-now part.

Well for one thing, everyone thinks it's our fault that these things happen. We should have known. We should have stopped it. We shouldn't be so strange, stupid, clumsy, wrong. We should have done better.

As if we missed that ball on purpose. As if we chose to fart like a trumpet in front of the big boss.

It was our job to stop it, and we blew it.

So to speak.

These situations all appear to be mighty darn personal.

Even though they happen precisely when we don't have the power or the responsibility we think we're somehow supposed to have.

So clearly it's not personal. Even though we think it is.

Because we can't stop it. Lord knows we would if we could.

I mean, watch the high-falutin spiritual concept of, "I'm not the doer" go right out the window in these situations.

While our obvious lack of jurisdiction threatens to expose that we are just powerless nothings that can't control anything.

Which is part of what we're ashamed of -- the lack of control itself.

And then, for added fun, there's more.

Because to get a good shame going, we have to be caught not having control.

Others have to see our lack of power. Which is why a loud fart when we're alone in the car is no problem.

No witness, no shame.

Being seen is what brings the red face.

Being exposed. As powerless. In prime time.

Oh the self hates it so much.

It hates being seen to be nothing.

Because there's no putting that back in the hat. The bunny gets out. And it poops on everything- on the sense of control, the sense of self, the image, the presentation, the pretense that we're a person in control of our body, our story, our world.

Everything in danger of vanishing.

Dammit.

To hell with all this enlightenment-seeking, lose-the-ego, see-through-the-self stuff. Bring on the high barricades and heavy-duty protection.

Enter shame.

"OMG look what I just did!" we say, taking credit for having done... something. And the Me turns red, cringes and wishes for a quick death.

While actually being secretly delighted.

Because in that moment, the hard-won, mind-created world is in zero jeopardy of being seen through.

Because we are far too busy dealing with shame.

Mission accomplished.

On the plus side, this is potentially good news for those hoping to experience what many call "enlightenment."

Because when we begin to get a glimmer that the situation itself is a front, the Me is a front, and the intense feeling of shame is a front and a cover-up…

When we can look behind any of this for even the merest moment,

We might begin to see that there's simply

Nothing

There

Behind the facade.

Which is such a surprising relief,

And requires no face.

Red or otherwise.

"You're only making a mess by trying to put things straight. You're trying to straighten out a wiggly world and no wonder you're in trouble."

~Alan Watts

DISSATISFIED

June 25, 2019

"Beyond the mind there is no such thing as experience."

~Nisargadatta

The mind finds things to be dissatisfied about.

It wants to solve, ruminate, figure out. It wants to fix, dwell and wallow.

Because it's thought. Thought needs something to think about.

Otherwise it might be seen to be nothing.

Which is unacceptable. To mind.

That's why what thought stews about- the particular subject matter, the topic, the content …

is irrelevant.

It all does the job.

Aloneness and lack of love, failure, money, relationships, performance, body, approval, addiction, politics or just plain wrongness…

It simply doesn't matter.

Mind wants a problem. Any will do.

That includes the so-called search for enlightenment.

As fodder for the circling mind, the pain of not getting enlightened, or getting it and losing it, or not understanding it, or understanding it but not experiencing it, or wanting more of it…

all or any of that…

is as good a thing to dwell on as anything else.

Folks think their inadequacy and their suffering and their sense of failure is worse or superior or different or special because it centers around consciousness and awakening and awareness, but actually,

They are just caught in the same mind-circling as everyone else.

Craving a different state or a longer-lasting experience is exactly the same as craving more success or better health or less addiction.

Thinking about enlightenment is still thinking.

Same.

Meanwhile people don't notice perfectly good lives, ignoring perfectly full, perfectly adequate, perfectly enough presents,

While pining for an imagined better state that will make everything perfect,

Later.

Some might even land on suicide as a solution.

Not noticing that even that is just mind coming up with things to think about.

Because finding solutions for pain also gives mind plenty to work with.

This can be hard to watch sometimes, as folks don't see what's already here and instead focus on what's supposedly lacking,

And that's how it goes- it is how the game works here.

These selves, focused on inadequacy even in the face of great abundance, will continue to feel like not enough.

Because as it happens, thought is right.

We- these selves, these personalities- are not enough. We are incomplete.

We are indeed flawed, imperfect, reactive, wrong and not authentically what we really are. We do follow thoughts and don't think straight.

Yes.

So what.

So what.

So what.

Perhaps it's enough. Anyway.

Perhaps even the thoughts and feelings of wanting more or something else,

Can be enough.

Perhaps what is not lacking can be enough.

Perhaps what is here can be enough.

And if not,

Perhaps lack, and not-enoughness, and non-awakening, and not-rightness, and hard feelings…

Also can be enough.

Perhaps mind can notice, even for a moment, that it's just stewing again. Just in order to be able to stew.

Which is why, for today, and other days,

I wish for you

A big, fat,

Life-enhancing,

Fill-'er-up,

Full of grace,

Dose of

So what.

"If you're seeking something beyond all the time, you never get with it. You're never here."

~Alan Watts

THE INNER LIFE

July 2, 2019

"All insides have outsides. You, as you feel yourself, are the inside, the animate being inside the skin. But the inside of the skin goes with the outside of the skin. And the outside of the skin is the whole darn cosmos. Galaxy beyond galaxy. The two are one and the same identity, one and the same Self."

~Alan Watts

They tell us to go inward.

They tell us to sit with feelings, express feelings, listen to feelings. They tell us to notice thoughts, inquire into thoughts, put more space between thoughts. They tell us to meditate, focus on the third eye, say the mantra, ask what the "I" actually is.

Even in sleep, we are instructed to pay attention, because dreams will tell us something important about the Me.

From shrinks to Self Help to Ramana, current Right-Way says, "The way in is the way out."

Most of us are fairly eager to do as instructed and dive in.

First, because going inward is supposed to make us feel better, or reduce flaws, or attain enlightenment. And who doesn't want that?

And second, because really what topic is more fascinating to the Me than the Me?

Y'know, that inadequate, traumatized, suffering, incomplete self we are so eager to soothe, improve, transform, or leave behind.

Sure, let's dive deeper into that thing.

But... how's that work, exactly?

I mean, that's a whole lotta focus on the self.

That delightful bottomless pit with no end, and no there, there.

Since there's always more thought, more feeling, more flawed behavior and memory, more "I am," to dig into.

And despite all that inward looking, more people are depressed and anxious than ever before.

So it could well be that all the inner focus has increased suffering. Rather than setting us free.

It could well be that all the focus on the Me keeps us locked into pain, and locked into the sense of self, locked into the sense of "I'…

Indefinitely.

It could even be that searching inwardly for understanding no-self brings an obsession with self, an obsession with how it reacts and what it understands…

Continually rooting us in the very thing we were hoping to transcend.

Which is egocentricity at its finest.

And probably not what is hoped for with all that seeking.

Not to mention, illogical.

Because peace, power, truth, spaciousness, vastness, consciousness, no-self, transcendence, and awareness of awareness (um, what?)…

These are great big ideas.

Perhaps too big to be contained "inside" a person.

For that much largeness, it might make sense to go bigger rather than smaller. Less in here and more out there.

Outside the individual. Outside these self stories.

Luckily if it can be found inside, then it can be found outside too.

Because internal and external are one and the same anyway. Because it's all connected, indistinguishable, the dividing line unfindable.

We've tried hard to be present to the Not-me within the individual, but that has left many of us stuck within the story of self, never finding the way "out."

So if discovering the Not-me is what is wanted, there's nothing to lose by turning our attention out, to it.

Shifting attention out of the individual's navel, with its thoughts and feelings, and looking outward…

To vastness, to existence, to the external, and to experience as it is happening.

Rather than to any one person's thoughts and feelings and opinions about what is happening.

In certain spiritual circles this may even be known as presence.

As in, present to what is happening outside the story of self, outside the story of traumatic past, outside personal preference, filter, and point of view.

Hello, external.

Hello, a different way to possibly discover that we are god, we are consciousness, we are experience, we are nothing and everything.

Who knows?

Free of the internal world, we might discover freedom from every world.

Inner and outer dissolving, dissipating, expanding into space.

Leaving "us", whatever that is,

Without.

And within.

And with poof.

Click here to get your Mind-Tickled every week.

"What is sought remains hidden from the seeker by already being everything."

~Tony Parsons

THOUGHT TARGET

July 9, 2019

"What tries to get rid of a thought is just another thought."

~Adyashanti

Those stinkin' thoughts.

Mean. Repetitive. Non-stop.

Stop that! Do it right! That's bad! Look out! Don't you ever learn? Don't do that! Be normal! What are you DOing? Boy you suck at this! Try harder! Be good!

Ensnaring us in, well…. something.

They feel like they're coming at us. They feel like they're aiming for us.

Like bird-poop bombs.

Guess who's the target.

So unfriendly. So unfair and wrong.

Naturally, in order to be saved from this constant attack upon our innocent selves, we want different thoughts, changed thoughts, nicer, less stressful thoughts. And while we're asking, can we have please more space between them too?

Or better yet, no thoughts at all.

Yeah that's what we want. No thoughts at all.

But no. We've got ‘em. Or rather, they have us.

Because clearly we don't own them. Too many people have the same ones.

So they must be community property.

Maybe if we can just figure out what we did to cause the constant barrage, we can stop the constant shirt-smearing. And we can figure out how to handle it when they land on us (which is usually), and how to meditate them away, or how to inquire for new and improved thoughts.

So of course we analyze them. What's IN this poop?

Because they feel like they happen to us.

Boom. We're placed. Anchored. Identified.

We're the center point.

The ones under all that poop.

There we are!

Thought locates the self.

Being the located, here-I-Am-the-victim-of-thoughts self, fending off all that attack…

Can make a person need a nap.

No wonder so many of us are pooped.

No pun intended. Ok maybe a little intended.

The thing is….

What if thoughts, whatever they are, are not happening to us?

What if they are us?

Which is different from being "identified" with them (whatever that means), or believing them, or determining if they're correct,

Or even witnessing them, which locates us, still, as the watcher.

But rather, BEing thought.

As in it's literally, actually, what we are.

Each thought, constantly changing, not located anywhere, not landing anywhere.

Happening. To no one.

It's all us. It's all we. We are them.

Everywhere. Everything.

Well, then the target vanishes.

Then there's nothing to get free of. No enemy to dodge. No target to protect or save. Nothing to stop or fix.

Ah. Much less work. And much less Me to fuss over.

Which as it happens, is what so many Mind-Tickler readers have been looking for…

This lightening of the sense of self, this seeing the wispy transparency of the sense of Me.

Here it is.

Without having to beat thought into submission.

Which is lovely, since that beating hurts.

When instead we might discover that simply trying on, "What if I am this thought? And this one?"

Might, more easily,

Be far more

Of a direct hit

On what we really are.

Bulls-eye.

"It's all thoughts, which are nothing."

~Robert Adams

TEACHER KNOWS

July 16, 2019

"You are only a disciple because your eyes are closed. The day you open them you will see there is nothing you can learn from me or anyone. What then is a Master for? To make you see the uselessness of having one."

~Anthony de Mello

Oh those wonderful wise spiritual teachers.

Each in their way seeming to hold the keys to this weird, confusing, bucking-bronco life.

Each in their way offering preferred methods to ride it with more ease, more peace, more answers.

Each having attained where we want to be, and appearing to know things, telling us they know things.

We trust them, depend on them, love them, and they claim to love us back.

Oh we love that too. "They're so full of real love!" we say dreamily, filling up on that fantasy.

Although... they don't know us, really. After all, they haven't memorized all our words and studied all our opinions, the way we have with them.

Still, through their presence, books and podcasts we can sometimes feel better, transcend, feel peaceful.

Their wisdom surely rubs off on us.

And even when we move from one sage to the other over the years, passing along new favorites to friends-

"Have you seen this book from Ramana /Adya /Daryl /Robert /Michael /John /Tony /Rupert? THIS one makes it all clear!"...

Still, every one of them has it. And we don't.

So we buy in.

We spend vast amounts of time, money, and mental real estate to ask some Wise Person questions like, "What has this been like for you?" and, "What do you think about xyx?" and, "Am I doing this right?" and, "What do I do when such and such happens?"

And their replies let us compare our not-there-yet lives to the fascinating stories about their arrived ones...

Letting us evaluate how we're doing based on their answers.

Which is still really all about us. Not them.

So following sages is still really another way to perpetuate the sense of self, not see through it.

Yet the teachers very much encourage this. Every one of them graciously setting up opportunities to answer our questions. Even those who claim they don't teach will happily and wordily sit in front of a room or circle to answer questions and try to make clear- with such certainty!- how things are and should be.

Because let's face it. All of us- they and we together... know that their ideas are better than ours. Their answers count more than ours. Their experiences matter more than ours.

Their thoughts are right. Ours aren't.

Even though really, all that important spiritual discourse is still just ideas, still just opinions.

Which are easily as potentially wrong as any other opinion.

And which do manage to solidify our already pervasive sense of lack, and need for improvement...

And turn us away from our own wisdom.

Conveniently, this keeps teachers in business. Whether money is involved or not.

So they're really not in a hurry for us to actually get it.

Which is perhaps why we never notice that since they're believing thoughts and ideas just like we are,

Then that thing we think they have, which we want so earnestly?

We already have it.

They have nothing we don't also have. What we seek is already ours.

In which case no one else is needed to provide it.

So if we're ever curious to discover what's already here and being ignored while we ask wise gurus to help us find it...

While we set aside our own wisdom to adopt theirs instead...

Perhaps we might take a breather from idealizing...

An equal-to-us depository of thoughts,

An equally opinion-believing,

Equally full of self,

Equally illusory,

Equally flawed,

Other.

Who knows? We might even find what we've looked for all along...

Right here.

"...nothing is being withheld from you. You are completely on your own. Everything is available for direct knowing. No one else has anything you need. No one else can lead you, pull you, push you or carry you."

~Jed McKenna

WHERE'S IT AT?

July 23, 2019

"No brain, no lotus."

~Judy adapts Thich Nhat Hanh

As some of you know, my 87 year-old mom is losing it.

Once, not so long ago, she was a sharp, efficient, capable person, given to successfully crossed-off to-do lists and ready laughter.

Now she is flustered, anxious, irrational and unable to think through even the simplest challenges.

Which of course is hard to watch, as well as sometimes sad, and sometimes alarming, and sometimes exasperating.

It's also fascinating.

Because one of the more common myths about dementia is that people just forget things, and otherwise they're like happy oblivious little kids, unburdened with the basic adult rules of life.

When actually there's not much childlike about my mother right now. Rather, she is belligerent, stubborn, argumentative and a flat-out liar.

The personality has changed.

As it actually does with us all, depending on context, all the time.

Dementia or not, personality ebbs and flows and adjusts with situations- that's how fluid and not tied to anything real it actually is. The self plays whatever role seems right in each context, making it up as it goes.

Of course most of the time that's not seen.

So what dementia can help to make clear is that the personality, the self, the Person,

Is created by the brain.

Not just housed there, in some amorphous sort-of-head-ish area. but actually created by it.

Because all those formative stories of our past, the ones that supposedly formed and created "Who we are..."

They haven't changed. My mom's past is still the same past it always was.

Yet now, with that exact same story, she is a new person.

So the past has nothing to do with the self.

And the ego is easy come, easy go.

Which might be great news for the seeker of enlightenment.

Except that ironically, along with the loss of the lifetime-honed personality...

Also comes the loss of the highly coveted awareness that would make a wonderful thing of that ego loss.

Turns out that when the brain is damaged, awareness, and awareness of awareness, go right out the window.

My mom's brain in its current state could no more see through the illusion of self, or experience the spacious unlocatable vastness of consciousness, than it could solve the problem of how to make a return at Macy's.

Take away the brain's ability to function properly, and awareness is outta here.

Which means they are tied together. Which means "enlightenment" is tied to a non-essential human experience that is dependent on the health of the limited brain.

Specifically the limited human brain. Since only the human species is afflicted with the idea that just being alive is not enough, and requires enlightenment in addition.

I mean awareness might indeed be sitting around waiting for us to be aware of it, to witness it, to transcend the story of self and access something greater than the Me-story...

But even if that's so, thinking is required in order to access it.

So perhaps we might reconsider being in a hurry to stop thoughts, or change them.

Because we need them.

Just as attaining enlightenment needs the meat in our heads.

Because when the sausage is damaged, bye bye awareness. Bye bye transcendence. Bye bye enlightenment.

All of which just confirms what we've heard a million times from a million sources in a million different words...

That what so many seek is not outside, but rather resides literally, right here, right now.

And we've already got it.

It's already here.

At least for now.

Meanwhile consciousness, whatever that is, enjoys as good an experience with my mom's damaged brain as with anyone else's functioning one.

Fuzziness? Yes. Crabbiness? Yes. Paranoia? Yes. Anxiety? Yes.

Why not?

This is it.

There's no right way.

This way is good.

We might enjoy it while we can.

Because sausage doesn't keep forever.

"Enlightenment is really nothing more than a simple epiphany, like remembering where you left your keys or realizing you don't like soft cheese."

~Jed McKenna

A DIFFERENT DOORWAY

August 6, 2019

"The poem gets written. I have wrestled with the angel and I am stained with light. My responsibility is not to the ordinary. My loyalty is to the vision, whenever and howsoever it may arrive."

~Mary Oliver

Let's generate some new ideas. Or make a needed decision. Or how about solving a problem that's been hanging around.

If you're an artist, go on and create the new painting, write the brilliant piece, choreograph the dance.

If you're not an artist, hey no biggie, so what? You're in charge here. Go ahead, do it anyway.

Right now.

No?

Well, OK, maybe genius will come in the shower, or in the middle of the night, or on a walk. And maybe you'll even remember it in the morning.

It's slippery though- even when it's written down, it may still irretrievably slide away.

As it pleases.

How weird that we haven't noticed that we can't generate ideas on our command, that inventiveness is not ours, that we are not the ones who solve

problems.

How weird to not notice that we have to get lucky, both to have inspiration show up in the first place, and then to hold on to it once it does.

Yes we do say, "I painted that," or "I had an idea," or "I wrote a book." And yes we do take credit for bringing it and doing it.

Even though the idea that we are the ones creating and solving so often comes with failure, stress, lack of motivation, writer's block, decision-stuckness, and apparently unsolvable problems.

Oh yay, give us more o' that.

Perhaps we're not the all-powerful Oz after all.

Because as it turns out, zero ideas actually come from us.

Unless we're counting judgment, dissatisfaction, disapproval, and criticism of whatever ideas do come through.

All of which is the opposite of inspiration. And paralyzing. And can even make us feel like an imposter.

Which happens to be true, if we think we are the ones who come up with brilliance.

So.... what does send ideas, if it's not us? What is in charge of creativity?

Well whatever it is, it's Not-Me.

It's biiiiiiiiiiiig. Way bigger than li'l ol' us.

Not to mention genius, with unlimited ingenuity. Because there's always more; it never runs out.

I mean, it would seem we're not even necessary.

Now, the ego may pout at seeing this.

But luckily for us, ideas have to have a vehicle. They need to occur to something, or else....

Nothing.

Creativity needs our hardware. It needs us to implement.

So we've got a partnership, a collaboration.

Creativity provides the magic, and humans provide the molding of the clay, the moving of feet, the typing things out.

Yes we're just being driven.

But at least we get to go for the ride.

And at least we're in good hands. Because this driver offers something far bigger, with infinite perspective, infinite options, and far more wisdom than we're ever going to have.

Ok fine, why does this matter?

Well, besides that it feels so much better when we see that we're not to blame when ideas don't come...

For those readers who care about having some understanding of consciousness...

There can be many ways to access this enlightenment thing.

I mean, maybe we don't have to sit cross-legged in meditation chanting OM through third eyes. Maybe we don't have to inquire into every thought, or memorize every word and hiccup Nisargadatta ever uttered.

Maybe there are other, possibly even better, ways out of the personality, out of the self.

Maybe creativity offers a different kind of meditation, a different kind of doorway.

Because what might happen when we're able to get the Me out of the way, and let something bigger do its thing?

On its own terms, unimpeded by human shoulds and shouldn'ts and deadlines and clocks?

What might happen when we can set aside notions that we are The Creators, and instead let something else blow vision and wisdom and imagination and solutions right on through us, like a flute?

Vehicle, not driver.

Who knows? We might find that's peaceful. Expansive. Maybe even blissful.

We might find relief from self-blame and haranguing voice.

We might find gratitude for smallness, for unimportance, and for the simple ability to be driven...

By dazzling enormity.

So it could be fun to get in the passenger side, and see where this baby goes.

Because pretty likely, it's somewhere we didn't know how to get to,

Ourselves.

"Art is Consciousness expressing Itself unimpeded by all those fallacious appearances of a 'Me'. The body is merely a tool through which Consciousness speaks."

~Ramesam Vemuri

GOT PURPOSE?

August 13, 2019

You know what drives a lot of people crazy? Thinking they have to find their purpose. What's the point-i-tis occupies many, many minds.

This is the case even though teacher after teacher...y'know, those experts we've turned to in hopes they'll help us find what they supposedly have...

Have said, in one way or another, that *This Is It*.

As it is.

As in, no point. As in, no purpose. As in, no meaning.

But we ignore the teachers on this, because we're pretty sure that that can't be right.

Because we do not like this*THIS*.

No we don't like needing money, or arguing with partners, or not sleeping, or eating alone. We don't like these politicians or that religion or that personality trait. We don't like the idea that some people claim to have an enlightened state and we don't. We don't like those feelings and these thoughts and this life that has no obvious purpose.

Do. Not. Like. No thank you.

And we're also pretty sure that if we don't like it, there can't possibly be any good or any benefit in any thing.

Most of us live with the conviction that our likes and dislikes are a valid determiner of whether something has value.

So we say, "Pfft" to life as it is, because, *don't like*.

And then we commence seeking for what we *do* like.

Which is- More, Better, Gimme.

Now *that,* we like.

So we seek it, and hard.

We seek better-liked feelings. We seek permanence - far more than life has ever promised, attempting to manipulate via kale and exercise to attain a longer life, or following careful rules hoping to entice enlightenment to provide unending bliss. We seek assurances of safety, though life offers absolutely none.

And we also seek meaning and purpose, just so we can earn the right to continue breathing in and out.

Though this makes no sense.

I mean, we're already here and breathing, so life clearly doesn't need us to qualify for it. Somehow though, that already-ness doesn't get in the way our trying to be worthy of life anyway.

And somehow we also haven't noticed that seeking can only lead to disappointment, dissatisfaction and even downright suffering.

It simply cannot succeed at bringing the control over existence that is intended. That plan is flawed.

We aim to find satisfaction with what's here, but only after we get something that's not here.

Or we'll be ok with What Is after it changes to something better liked, or after we somehow find a way to like it.

Later.

We're waiting.

Our acceptance of the present is qualified and conditional and on hold.

So of course we experience the present as not enough.

Which is exactly the opposite of what we're looking for.

Screw that *This is It* stuff.

And then we dare to bargain with existence, essentially saying, "Ok Life, tell you what... I'll get on a "path," I'll study and inquire and meditate and work to attain. I'll earn it. But then I want my reward. I want a purpose."

Which never comes.

Because see, This is still It.

Liked or not.

Now if right about here, the mind begins to pout and say, "Well, if there's no purpose, then why go on? Why be alive?"...

We might first notice how if it can't get what it wants, it threatens to die. Like any toddler having a tantrum.

And then we might answer, "Because, why *not* be alive?"

Here we are. Is this not good enough for us?

After all, are we more important than other life forms? For example do mosquitos need a point or purpose to exist? Do dust mites sit around dissatisfied with existence because they're not attaining enlightenment or scoring more bliss, and they don't know whyyyyyy?

No. Most likely ('cause of course who knows) they live their lives, going about the business of mosquito- living. They're not trying to make things different or more to their liking.

Life as it is is enough.

Whereas we humans- we ever-so-special, grasping, full of importance humans- are regularly making demands of existence.

And then we hurt or fear or are outraged when it doesn't work.

So we just might suffer in ways dust mites do not.

Meanwhile, maybe *What Is* actually knows what it's doing, having things just as they are.

Maybe our vague sense of lacking something, of missing purpose, is actually the point we nutty humans have been so eager to find.

Right here in front of us, all along.

Maybe even our suffering or laughter or anger or illness or love or boredom or resistance or lack of presence is also the point and purpose we seek.

I mean, all of that is What Is too.

Existence doesn't mind struggle.

That's as good a thing to experience as any other.

All experiences equal. Despite human preferences.

So sure we can keep wanting something else, waiting for something else, or trying to make something else happen. And sure we can keep struggling and demanding a purpose which is already here and already ours.

We can ditch it all and go for a walk too.

Why not.

Existence says yes.

Because like or dislike,

Want or not want,

Seek or don't seek,

Purpose or no purpose...

This is still...

It.

YOU AGREE?

August 20, 2019

A friend tells me that I have a spiritual point of view that most closely resembles their own.

They agree with me, apparently.

Which is what humans do- determine our point of view, and determine what we agree with.

We are constantly defining how we see things.

We kind of have to, actually. Because eliminate opinion and we have zero idea who, what, or where we are.

So naturally we need to know what side we're on, we need to know our position.

Though, aren't those interesting words? Because they're supposedly referring to ideas, but actually they're more literally indicating...

Geography.

"This is where I stand."

As if points of view place us.

Like, "Looking for me? You'll find me over here, standing on the "I'm for no children in cages" spot."

Weird, isn't it?

I mean, what are we, bats? Sounding radar-opinions out into the night, using viewpoint as our locator, our GPS?

"Here I am. I'm the one who is on this political side, who thinks dealing with feelings is best done XYZ way, who likes UG more than Jiddu."

Right here. Me. I.

Located. Through opinion.

And then, we go looking for matches.

Because it's not enough just to know what side we're on.

No, it has to be announced. To everyone, everywhere.

We want people to know. We really want people to know.

In fact if we can't announce our point of view in any given situation, we say things like, "I can't be myself around them."

Which is not okay with us.

Enter the slogan T-shirt, the custom license plate, the correction of all those obviously wrong Facebook posts by others. Enter the necessity to slather, "Yeah that's right!" and, "What are you smoking!" all over the internet, and at family dinners.

Our take on everything Must. Be. Known.

Can you say "compulsion," boys and girls?

Because the drive to state our stance is almost irresistible.

As if we need that arrow pointing to "us" at all times.

Could it be the self coalesces around a point of view?

Of course, such reification and solidity is tenuous. Because after all, the self is a flimsy little thing, needing constant support.

So we gather agree-ers and like-minded others around us, blocking many if not all disagree-ers.

As if that We're-On-The-Same-Side community will give us connection with...

An unknown whole.

We think agreement equals that yearned-for connection.

Never mind that "taking a side" eliminates wholeness from the get-go.

Still, the individual constantly yearns for integration... homecoming, almost... with what's real, truer, bigger than any vaporous concept.

Because we know that's what we are.

And because these ridiculous individuals we are pretending to be do not feel whole.

Which is how we miss that connection with the whole is already present, and what we crave is already here.

I mean, vapor mixes with vapor. It's not held in place by some edge, border or wall of a side or position or stance. It has to merge, because, y'know, vapor.

Thoughts, concepts, points of view, have to blend together with the us-es and thems.

Whether we know this or not. Whether we agree or not.

Now of course there's nothing wrong with having a point of view, and nothing wrong with shouting it from every rooftop and Facebook timeline.

After all, we couldn't stop if we wanted to.

But it might be interesting to see that agreement, and the gathering of tribes, and the elimination of anyone outside the tribe, will never get us the connection we crave.

While simply seeing the arbitrary-ness and wispiness of self and point of view, actually might.

Which could be fun.

And of course this is just my point of view, just Judy's position.

It may be close to your position or not.

I'll do my best to be on your team either way.

Agreed?

LOVE CONNECTION

September 3, 2019

When I was a little girl, I daydreamed about falling in love and having a happily ever after. I spent hours conjuring my prince- what he looked like, what his name was, what he wore, what candy he'd bring me.

I longed for this. At age 6.

I guess we're never too young to believe that the answer to the perfect life is out there waiting.

And we humans sure do love romantic love.

We love having someone to keep company with us, share experiences with us, be kind to us, understand us, support us, bring out the best in us.

We love having someone listen to us, hear us, look at us, see us. We love having someone care about us, have a feeling in their chests...

Y'know, about us.

I mean, we even love our pets because they love us.

Noticing a pattern here?

Oh no. Say it ain't so, Mind Tickler.

Say it's not that romantic love turns out to be yet another way just to think about our selves all the time.

Say it's not that love is actually about getting others to be as all-about-me as we are.

I mean, when we think about the loves in our lives, does not every one of them come down to, "Do they think about me, do they feel the right things about me, are they nice to me? Am I getting what I need and want?"

And if we think about those situations where love somehow didn't have something to do with us, then we said, "No thanks. I'm outta there and on to someone better. For Me." And then hello break-up, divorce, cheating.

Maybe next time we'll do things righter and find the right one- someone who will take us in better, and give us the validation we deserve.

Someone who will confirm Me.

Someone who will reify this self and put it center stage.

Damn.

Somehow we've contorted even love, that great connector of individuals into a greater whole, into a way to enhance and reinforce separate individuality instead.

Which, though convoluted, does make sense really.

Because we seemingly separate personalities do feel a powerful yearning to connect with something greater. We do strongly desire that full sense of union, of blending. We do long to get back to what we really are, to what isn't separate, to what isn't individual..

Yet at the same time...

What self-respecting individual really wants to invalidate the Me, lose the ego, "die to the self," and blend into nothing?

Yeah, um, thanks and no.

Now I know reading this might not be fun. Or dreamy.

In fact, it's the opposite of dreamy.

It's awake-y.

And most often, these personalities don't like that. We'd much rather sleep in a little longer, please.

Which is why love of any kind feels so darn good.

Because it might be the closest we can get to holding onto that story of Me and also feeling part of that whole, that bigger-than-us-something.

Love might be the best we can do to merge somehow and yet still hold onto these C'mon-I'm-Me stories of individual.

Certainly back when I was a kid, that connection so full, so all-encompassing, so filling, that I could die from the fullness and bliss-

That's what I actually craved.

Not that I knew that then.

And of course 6-year olds are usually not consciously aware of the connection they already have, and already are.

So for all of us seemingly separate persons, thank goodness for love.

Because seeing through self, seeing the wispiness of these apparently personalities, is not for every one.

Love offers apparent individuals a way to come close...

Very close...

Very very close....

Without actually having to meet...

Or kill...

The Buddha.

REALITY? 2.0

September 17, 2019

Recently someone on social media wrote to me.

"Do you agree that "Perception is reality?" My perception can't be trusted. I need a touchstone when I am off kilter. I surround myself with trustworthy individuals who help reorient me. What do you think of that?"

Well. Since he asked...

I think someone thinks certain individuals know more truth than he, and that they can put him right (per their version, of course).

I think someone thinks certain others are better oriented (whatever that is) and don't have off-kilter thoughts.

Also, I think someone thinks I am a trustworthy individual.

Oh dear. Should I tell him, or just leave him to his little illusions?

Either way, his question already contains its answer.

Since no human can ever know anything outside whatever our physical hardware (eyes, ears, skin etc) and conditioning is capable of perceiving.

These are sieves which create a highly unique, very individualized sense of existence.

Which gives consciousness a one-of-a kind, infinitely varied experience.

No human is exempt from this.

Including gurus, teachers and sages. They have filters, biases and conditioning too.

They have points of view, inclinations and mind-sets.

Theirs.

Their opinions are the exact same biased, filter-based, fluffy nothings as ours.

Which is why there are no "trustworthy individuals" who are clearer or less off-kilter than anyone else.

So yes, perception is reality.

Though it's strictly our perception, our reality.

Not real reality.

It's a very specifically individual, one-off reality.

Which some might find distressing.

Because no human will ever actually know what reality is.

Or even IF it is.

After all, is it truly reality if it varies from individual to individual?

I mean, anyone who has ever taken a life drawing class has seen that the view and resulting drawings completely vary depending on where in the room the artist's easel stands.

Same model, same pose. Yet as many different drawings as there are easels.

Which artist is right? Which easel position provides more truth than the other easels? Which artist sees reality?

Yeah.

No one has The Answer.

Reality is a concept, and an unprovable one at that.

Which might be good news.

Because it means our own perspectives are just as true and rich and full of wow! as any guru's.

So maybe we can let up on trying to standardize this vast, infinite variety into some notion of "reality."

Maybe we can enjoy the placement of our own easel,

And enjoy both the enormity... and the smallness... of our individual viewpoints.

Because we are the only one,

Literally the only one,

Who can be our particular iteration

Of consciousness.

And that is one helluva work

Of art.

DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS

September 24, 2019

"I owe my solitude to other people."

~Alan Watts

This weekend I inadvertently pissed off a family member. As in, reeeeallly pissed them off. As in, relationship-ending pissed them off.

Over something that would seem to be barely worth the words about it.

And yet somehow there were plenty of words. Ugly, nasty, can't-take-'em back words.

At first I was shocked, bewildered. I couldn't see how to jive what I was hearing with my own experience of our times together.

Because according to this family member, I have been a terrible, unlovable, demeaning, entitled and cruel-for-years person.

Naturally, defensiveness rose up.

In knows-better-than-this moi.

What! They're calling me a person?! I'm outraged!

Well okay that wasn't quite it. But still,

For a while, defense seemed *necessary.*

Danger! Sirens! Strobes! Protection from this clearly... terrible... threat! These... um...

Words.

Insert eye roll emoji here.

Yes, thankfully, seeing that there's no legitimate or literal threat does calm things a bit.

But the compulsion to defend and protect is strong.

Because, y'know, *compulsion*.

After all, we've spent a lifetime carefully crafting a story of who and what we are, curating identity into something that we can live with.

We can't have someone come along and turn all that careful image-building work to nothing.

That won't do.

So these identity stories *require* defense. It's not optional.

So F that crazy family member and their out-of-the blue finger-pointing.

Although funny thing about relationship messes - only perceived separate individuals can get into them.

Because what are relationships, if not the business of connecting with other individual persons who, amazingly enough, also have an identity to protect?

So everyone runs around projecting the preferred tale of their individuality and predilections and tolerances onto any body that has the misfortune to be nearby.

Making relationships mighty tricky stuff.

As of course anyone who has ever known any other human being already knows.

And then adding to the fun, since humans can't see anything without filters,

In particular the filter that we're individuals,

It's impossible to not project.

Which means we can never know who's "right". Even though we're positive we do know.

What a lovely field for mind's very favorite ploy-

Drum up a good drama in order to reify the sense of self!

Ignore the filters, defend the image, protect and maintain the self story at all times, and work up a good outrage.

All while nothing is actually threatened, and nothing actually needs protection.

Oh it just loves this stuff.

Luckily for us though, if we can see through this, it's a much less angry, dangerous world.

Because whether we retreat to a cave and isolate, or party on down in constant company,

We are still...

Consciousness experiencing itself.

Which makes us all the same stuff. All the same intangible vapor.

And already connected to itself.

Which is why human relationship may or may not appear to be severed, but connection can't ever be.

Because we are literally them. There's no way to sever that.

And gratefully, truly seeing this leaves only compassion for the partners, children, coworkers, friends, parents,

For the autopilot defenses, armaments, preservations, and outrages,

And for all the beauty in suffering...

That comes with thinking we're a person.

A person somehow *able* to be disconnected and cut off from others.

Instead of the vast unlimited connectedness we already have,

And already

Are.

"There is no me or you. All that apparently manifests—the world, the life story, the search for home, is the one appearing as two, the nothing appearing as everything, the absolute appearing as the particular.... We are the dreamers in this dream, and it is fired by our longing to come home."

~Tony Parsons

IMPROVEMENT!

October 1, 2019

"This place where you are right now, God circled on a map for you."

~Hafiz

One of my friends is at the tippy-top, the ultimate pinnacle, of the dance world. She is among the very best of the very best. There's no more climb-to-the-top left for her; she's there. And yet she often thinks, "Wouldn't it be nice to get better and be as good as (other dancer?)"

As if she isn't right there on the pinhead *with* that other person. Already.

And as if, with some magically perfect perfecting, her dance and life and self will be somehow, inexplicably, better.

Which makes sense I suppose, when we consider how pervasive and absolutely everywhere the idea of self improvement is.

I mean let's face it, whether it's a top-level dancer or the rest of us average Joes, these selves need tidying. In skills and achievements, in personalities and feelings, these self things are messy and unpredictable. They say wrong stuff, do wrong stuff. Ugh, and those feelings!

Make it stop.

So we get to bettering. We wake up every morning aspiring to be the best we can be. We work on eliminating baggage, striving to be more kind, more calm, more giving, more successful, more enlightened. We aim to get to where external influences no longer trigger reactivity.

I mean, why not? Seems harmless enough, right? Maybe even helpful. Where's the problem?

We'll just set aside the, "But what is this self we are trying to improve," woo. For the moment anyway.

It's just that, what living person in all of time has ever actually achieved this 100% totally-improved goal? After all, if it was the least bit possible, shouldn't someone - at least one of the many billions of humans- have attained the perfect baggage-less upgrade by now?

Not that we would know. We have no idea what Nothing-left-to-fix-completely-improved-already-best-they-can-be even looks like. I mean, it doesn't even look like my already-best dancer-friend.

Because even when better does happen, we're then focused on getting more of it- more achievement, more polishing, more perfection.

Which makes for depression. And anxiety. And failure.

Which we then also need to reform.

Hello, unwinnable loop. Hello, unending project.

Besides, when we aspire to be the best person we can be, what does that say about the person we are *currently?* Is it good enough?

If so, why is improvement necessary?

And yet, the mind sees no alternative.

Because self improvement comes partly out of the confused idea that we have the power to see ourselves clearly in the first place.

As if we can get outside ourselves, and can look back at us.

Like there's an external and internal, with a dividing line between them. And somehow we're on both sides.

And then weirdly, we also think we know which of those sides is the real us.

But do we?

Because usually, in everyday life and in every self-help approach ever written, it's a given that we, whatever that is, are inside.

And yet when needed, somehow we leak outside in order to see ourselves.

Which makes no sense. Nothing can see itself. One can only see whatever one is looking at, from outside it.

So are we the vast outside looking back or are we the teeny lump of meat that is being seen?

There's only one of us.

And then we might notice whether that enormous external-looker-back, whatever it is- actually thinks the small internal-whatever needs improving, or fixing, or changing.

Assuming it even understands that concept.

And we might also notice whether this uncontained external whatever-*ITSELF* needs improving.

Hear that laughter?

That just might be Perfection-Us, enjoying that little imposter-us thinks it needs to be "better."

As if a hologram can ever know what is good or bad about itself, and can then set about changing itself.

So maybe we've had it wrong all this time.

Maybe existence has room for this particular me-thing- in all its variety of color, feeling, and quirky flawed personality. As it is.

Maybe there's no need to tidy up or reject any aspect -small or large- of this human experience.

Because it just could be that that inclusive, accepting, all-encompassing "external" perfection is what we actually are.

As opposed to the deluded Pinocchio puppet that dreams of being a real boy.

Which sure leaves us with a whole lot less work. And a whole lot of acceptance. And a whole lot of enough-ness.

And happens to be the best,

The most incomprehensibly, vastly, hugely, perfectly

Best

It can be.

Already.

"Be kind to your sleeping heart.
Take it out into the vast fields of light...
And let it breathe."

~Hafiz

MORE ENOUGH FOR YOU

October 8, 2019

"First,
the fish needs to say,
'Something ani't right about this Camel ride-
and I'm Feeling so damn
Thirsty.'"

~Hafiz

My friend had a particularly hard time last week. Hurting. Heavy. Isolating. Binging. Hard to get out of bed and function.

You might have had similar experiences yourself- most people have times like this at some point in their lives, sometimes many points.

Sometimes many many points.

So today's Tickler will not be its usual adorable, tickle-your-mind-so-you-have-fun-finding-all-this-woo-woo-stuff-yourself, self. Instead, today's Tickler is cutting to this particular chase.

Which is...

It's hard to think you're a person. This person. This You.

Think you are a separate individual contained in the body and you're going to feel incomplete and inadequate. Think you are a separate individual contained in the body and you're going to have the "inner critic" tell you that you're not good enough.

And you will be correct. You feel deficient because you are deficient.

The individual self is indeed incomplete. Small, limited, flawed, odd, trapped- yes.

This is the price for being certain of what you are.

And it's expensive, this near-constant sense of lack. Because there's never enough love, enough success, enough kindness, health, attractiveness, discipline. There's never enough enlightenment. There's always a vague sense of not good enough.

So naturally you try to fill up that sense of missing something. Busyness and productivity, satsangs and retreats, money, love, addictions.

And of course none of that does the job.

Which is additionally painful.

So hopefully once in a while you ask yourself...

SO WHAT?

Because truly, what's not ok about being insufficient?

Yes you're not perfect, not good enough, not healthy, not enlightened. So what?

What about this unwholey state of affairs actually needs to be fixed?

You might discover that *not good enough* is actually quite good enough.

There can be enormous relief just in that acceptance.

However, sometimes the requirement to fix is too strong for acceptance. Sometimes the sense of demanding perfection from your self feels urgent.

Sometimes the sense of self rejects this separate being, and urgently longs to connect with something better, something bigger.

Because it only ever wants to get back to the garden.

At those times, you can start with *simply noticing* the pull to get back to wholeness and perfection again.

Notice the compulsion.

Notice the desire to fill up what's lacking, what's empty, with*something*.

Because just the act of noticing itself, the observation, can change things. (There's plenty of science and studies proving that observation affects reality.) ***

And then, notice the noticing.

After all, things can't observe themselves. Things can only be observed from the outside.

No matter what it "feels like," you are either what notices, or what is being noticed.

See which is closer to what you really are- the inauthentic, incomplete, loser individual self, or whatever notices it.

And then see if whatever that is that notices you, watches your self, experiences your self...

See if that's incomplete. See if that's inadequate. See if that's in need of fixing, or a drink, or love, or anything at all.

Because how much "more" does *everything* need? It's already everything.

Whoa. Look at you.

You're enormous. You're complete. You're perfect.

As is.

You're more than sufficient,

More than good enough,

Already.

Go ahead,

Try keeping that in bed.

*** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observer_effect_(physics)

"We are the dreamers in this dream,
The source of the hidden principle is ourselves, and it is fired by our longing to come home."

~Tony Parsons

SUFFERING: DON'T LIKE!

October 15, 2019

"First,
the fish needs to say,
'Something ani't right about this Camel ride-
and I'm Feeling so damn
Thirsty.'"

~Hafiz

I had some oral surgery last Friday. Yes, it was as much fun as you probably imagine.

Pain, swelling, foggy head (thanks RX! And also a caution for what follows in this Tickler because, y'know, still drugged up).

For now, we shall call this "suffering."

Ugh. Don't like.

Part of the aftercare instructions were to eat only very soft foods for 2 weeks.

Which might sound like more suffering, until we consider that it means mashed potatoes, mac ‘n cheese, mousses and puddings. So I've been instructed to eat, on purpose, foods grown-ups often don't indulge in too much, at least without some personal finger-wagging and scolding.

Free pass for me. Like!

And let's not forget Dr-approved, allowed-for-3-days sleep.

Extra like!

Well dang, this is confusing isn't it?

I mean, is suffering supposed to be so delightful?

After all, as everyone knows, suffering is bad. *Don't like* is bad.

In fact, *don't like EQUALS* bad. It's the very definition of bad.

And therefore, no thanks.

Because no way anything we *don't like* could be good. There can't possibly be any benefit in any thing we *don't like*. Only *like* could be good.

Which is convenient.

Since it's almost as if good and bad actually revolve around little ol' me's preferences and evaluations.

As if our likes and dislikes *determine* right, wrong, bad, good.

Y'know, all powerful us. Knowers of good and bad. Creators of worlds.

When actually, regardless of whether suffering is physical or emotional,

This automatic equivalence between sensation and *like* or *dislike* often makes experience more intense and more flat-out miserable.

Because then it's personal.

As in person-al.

As in, likes and dislikes separate us into me and not-me. Me the sufferer, the one who experiences, who is different and separate from experience itself.

Which expands into me the one who needs to learn the lesson in this, or the one being punished, or the one unfairly attacked by existence.

Turns out, likes and dislikes impose a small point-of-view center on a very vast existence.

And make the sense of self feel solid, and real, and like a thing.

Which is fine of course.

Unless we *don't like* suffering.

Which, I'm pretty sure, we don't.

Luckily, we can simply consider the possibility that we what we are is the experience itself, the sensation, the happening, rather than the liker or disliker it's happening *to*…

And the me-story begins to decentralize.

Evaluation fizzes out. Likes and don't-likes become irrelevant.

Experience is seen to be What We Are, rather than something happening to us.

The sense of a solid self goes *pfffft*.

Often taking suffering with it.

Because existence has no preferences. All experience is equal, neutral at least, and fond at best, of all happenings.

Including so-called pain and suffering.

Which is not denial, or bypassing, or avoidance.

We still feel, or we don't, we still like, or we dislike. All equal, all welcome, all happening.

This is simply seeing what we really are for a moment.

And we have suffering to thank for that glimpse of truth.

Which, for so many seekers of enlightenment,

And for so many folks in pain,

Just might be,

A very big,

An incomprehensibly big,

Like.

"Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so."

~Shakespeare

"Life is hard.
Then you die.
Then they throw dirt in your face.
Then the worms eat you.
Be grateful it happens in that order."

~David Gerrold

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

October 29, 2019

"Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder 'Why why why?'
Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand."

~Kurt Vonnegut

Oh elusive enlightenment.

If there's any desire for that exalted state, the demand to understand and get it is strong.

We want AHA!s and realizations and explanations and "Oh I see!"s. We want to know why. We want things to make sense.

Enter The Witness, Being Aware of Awareness, Going Inward, Big Self, Little Self, The Path, The Gate. Enter satsangs and gurus and unending questions and requests for explanations from said gurus.

Understanding will be ours. Whoo hooo!

Although… what exactly does this understanding? What transcends the self's usual focus on me-me-me in order to comprehend, see through, and be aware of…

Itself?

I mean, it's certainly not the self. That would make understanding dependent on a very unreliable source.

Especially since trying to transcend, trying get outside of the mind in order to comprehend the mind, would thus be using that very same mind to do it.

Which is a brilliantly looping rigged system.

After all, even the word "realized" contains the word "real." The word makes real, a being, a subject, which realizes and is aware of awareness.

Which makes awareness of awareness a subjective experience. A subject, The Me, is aware of itself and therefore separate from the thing (Me) it is aware of.

So we say we want comprehension of no-self and no separation and not-two, and we want to get outside ourselves to see our selves, and yet still…

Getting-Outside starts from the Right-Here.

Which isn't outside.

Nothing can get outside itself.

Making Awareness as we understand it, actually just more us. The Witness is just more us.

Regardless of how spacious and big it "feels like."

Understanding reifies the self.

Perhaps you can see the flaw in this approach.

Luckily though, no matter what we think or feel like,

Consciousness is not in little ol' us. We are in it.

We are OF it.

Making us It, itself.

The Divine, the vast, the incomprehensible.

We are that.

Which means, while we happily explain what awareness is and how it works and how we can "access" it,

We are everything, every experience. Already.

Look at us, Being it.

We are joy and beauty and anger and tears and laughter and color and music and triggers and pain and addictions.

Because what is awareness, consciousness, the Divine, if not Everything?

Whether understood by humans or not.

And leaving no one, no Me, no locatable point of view, to understand.

So it may be a relief to know that we never will. We'll never comprehend.

Whether we're certain we do or not.

And despite all those fist-shaking assurances on social media.

Human understanding is not possible.

Though sure, we can keep trying. Why not?

After all, understanding is IN it too. IS it too.

Though yes, grasping does get in the way of what we claim to want.

Still, we are that too.

So feel free to carry on trying to figure it all out…

And being aware…

Of being aware…

Of being aware…

Of being aw...

Aha! That's it!

Ahhh.

Got it.

"You are asking, 'Who am I?' and you are not going to get an answer, because the one who will get the answer is false. You may have an idea, a concept, and you will think you have found yourself, but it is only a concept; you can never see your Self."

~Nisargadatta

"There was a young man who said, "Though
It seems that I know that I know,
What I WOULD like to see
Is the 'I' that knows 'me'
When I KNOW that I know that I know."

~David Gerrold

MIND-TICKLER

November 5, 2019

By now you may already know that my mom died this past weekend.

So there will be no new Mind-Tickler this week. There's also been no time to update a previous one to resend.

So this is it. (A little nondual humor there. Ok, very little.)

So this week you get a breather from the Tickler.

I'll just leave you with the little tiny tickle that uncertainty can be kind sometimes, and the present is good.

Sending you my love till next week.

"All that you think is rain is not."

~Rumi

NO DEATH, NO

November 12, 2019

"It's all fun and games, until someone loses an I."

~Unknown

We're afraid of it, this death thing.

Very afraid.

That's why we spend an inordinate amount of our lives trying to protect against it, and keep it away. We have seat belts and prayer meetings and "Gezundheit!"s and mittens and MRI's and vaccinations and rotated tires and chemo and Crossfit and broccoli.

Not that we don't enjoy tempting such terrifying danger, like with scary movies, roller coasters, bungee-jumping, sky diving, speed racing. "All who gaze upon us, know that we have outwitted and are the master of death!"

Long as we don't actually die. Then no one is laughing.

It makes sense though. After all, there was a loved one here- a person, an individual- with their story and history and loves and peccadilloes.

They were here.

And then they weren't.

We call this "loss," as in, "*I lost my mom this weekend*."

Here we had access to a person all this time, and then death had the nerve to take away…

Something we already had.

Without asking us. Without our control. And not just for a while, but permanently.

This is not ok with us fill-er-up humans. We want more, dammit, not less. Emptiness where filled-up space used to be?

NO.

So this is what we fear- this apparent disappearance of a self.

Which is not unreasonable, given that entire lifetimes are spent protecting that image of a person. "This is who I am. This is what happened to me. This is what I offer. This is who I have in my life."

Every single moment of every single life is about perpetuating that story of a past, prolonging its likes and dislikes, protecting it from loss, polishing its image and presentation, getting others to buy in.

Like for my mom, who spent her last night cleaning her desk so it looked good when she was found, and who chose her last clothes carefully, knowing she would go to the coroner's in them.

And then death says, "*That's enough*." And we can no longer pull off pretending there's a person there anymore.

We cannot bear the seeming end of the story.

There is nothing humans hate, tantrum against and wail about, more.

Meanwhile, focused on what is lost, focused on the emptiness of the end of the movie, we may fail to notice that…

We were never that movie to begin with. We were never bodies *in* the movie either.

Because skin, hearts, brain-meats- they don't care about stories.

And whatever animates the body, whatever is more than the brain, the images, the "personality",

Whatever loved the story...

Well, that isn't biological.

Which means it was never alive.

Which means it can't die.

Or leave. Or be "lost."

After all, since it's not trapped inside a body, it's already everywhere.

So who knows. Without the encumbrance of a dragged-around fiction,

Without trying to squeeze something so very very big into a teeny little biological cluster of cells,

Without being forced into the box of person-ality and person-hood,

We might discover that we are so much closer to our loved ones than we ever had been in so-called life.

We might discover, along with an untamed love and a freedom and a closeness so very vast and so very loving…

That there's no reason to cry for the false loss of a false self,

When instead we might absorb into the truth and incomprehensible enormity of

The great inclusiveness

That has been gained.

So,'*bye*,

and *hi*,

mom, and dad, and every loved one ever. ❤️

"Transiency makes evident the Unchanging."

~Wu Hsin

BYPASSING?

November 26, 2019

"There is no difference between Nirvana and the everyday world."

~David R. Loy

My client says she's been feeling really good.

Peaceful, spacious, quiet, complete, and lighter by far.

Y'know, *really* good.

She's kind of amazed, actually.

And then... concern sneaks in.

Maybe she's feeling *too* good.

Maybe there's too much wholeness, too much peace.

She starts to wonder if under all this serenity there are still unseen realizations, still unresolved trauma.

Maybe this better feeling is (gasp) bypassing.

Bypassing is bad.

First, because as we all know, the right way to do life is to feel the hard feelings. We need to sit with them, validate them, turn towards them.

If we want contentment and better feelings later, we have to dive into and focus on bad feelings, not good ones, now.

Which is some kind of weird circular reasoning, considering that what we ultimately want to sit with bad feelings for, is to get those spacious good feelings. Which are already here. *Without* having to wait by dwelling on suffering.

But okay.

Second we all also know that in order to get shifts in the future, to feel good in the future, to be *entitled* to feel good in the future…

We must have *AHA!s* and realizations and better understandings of our past, our patterns, our inner child, first.

And if we're feeling content already, we may not bother with all that investigation and inquiry, and critical discoveries about self will get prevented, downright *diverted,* by too much feeling good.

So it's very important to not let peace get in the way of, and bypass, paying attention to all that pain.

After all, there's no relief that can't be improved by a good dose of efforting.

Then more peace, *better* peace, righter peace, will be ours at last.

No? Then enjoy some extra guilt and worry about doing things wrong, to fully eliminate any spaciousness that may have erroneously shown up for a while.

Sigh.

You can see that this everyone-buys-into-it story about "bypassing" is really just a requirement that the mind be in charge of every darn thing, right? A requirement to ensure that we not go getting all sufficient and complete, without involving the mind?

Even when we're already experiencing the peace we've sought for so long?

Because when we label an experience of current peace, "*bypassing*," mind is essentially saying, "Look out! You'll feel bad later, if you feel good now."

As in, "There will be punishment for your peace. You will pay with deep future pain."

Feeling good is suspicious, feeling good isn't right, feeling good is bypassing. Don't feel good.

So perhaps we can start to see that peace and contentment can actually become downright...

Revolutionary and subversive.

Because they begin to make us *insubordinate* to mind.

Dramatic words, yes. Perhaps true, though.

Still, if this feels like too heretical a perspective, not to worry. No one has to ignore feelings.

Feel them, or don't.

After all, they're just feelings. They're not so world-rulingly important.

It's just that maybe *where we put our attention* has always been more shifting than what we feeeel.

And instead of always focusing our attention on attaining the right feeling, maybe once in a while we can play with attending to - what cares, what hates one feeling and likes another, what feels in the first place, and what real thing, realizes.

Just for fun.

Because shifts happen all kinds of ways.

And maybe it's possible to relax the need to do things right...

Relax the rule to *not* bypass...

And trust the peace when it shows up.

Which just might be

A whole new kind of

Really good.

"Sometimes I need only to stand wherever I am to be blessed."

~Mary Oliver

HEY I'M ENLIGHTENED!

December 3, 2019

"The person who says, 'I'm enlightened,' probably isn't."

~Ram Dass

Recently I was asked, for about the zillionth time, if I'm enlightened.

What to say, what to say...

Both "yes" or "no" are lousy options.

Say no and I'm dismissed; the asker moves on to the next magician who has better sleight of hand than moi *(pretty much everyone)*.

Say yes and… Oh! Hear the trumpets? See the confetti? Yay me! So special!

Hmmm. That couldn't be ego and apparent confirmation of the superior, separate, individual self, right?

Uh oh.

Could be I don't have what I'm claiming to have.

Plus, then the unenlightened questioner gets to compare what they supposedly don't have, to what I supposedly do.

Confirming their own deficiency, lack and emptiness as an individual, while putting me on a pedestal of envy.

So my *yes* tidily confirms both of our senses of identity and personhoods, and neither of us sees through the self illusion.

Great.

Of course this assumes that we even agree on what enlightenment is, or that it can actually be attained.

Which most likely, we don't.

After all, what most folks seek to "attain" is nonstop, permanent, never-reacts, bliss.

Even though no one- not even the sainted Ramana - has ever actually achieved said non-reactivity, permanently.

And even though "attaining" inherently means *getting*- as in, it's missing and needs to be gotten.

Which means the present is lacking.

Which means, um… no.

But let's pretend for a moment that everyone does agree on the definition of awakening.

Let's say everyone knows that enlightenment is the actual experience that we are everything- every sound, every sensation, every color.

Not *nothing, everything*.

And let's say everyone has truly seen that the world, self, seen objects, and felt senses, are 100% illusion, and that the constant, arbitrary establishment of a person, a location, a stance, doesn't actually, *in any way*, exist.

Got it?

(checks watch) Transformed yet? Transcended yet?

Or is the usual desire for a better existence and a better experience, with better feelings, better knowledge, better awareness and better evolution, still alive and well?

Right.

Still, people do find comfort in grabbing onto some teacher's words and then pretending to have experienced some of that claimed magic for themselves.

Though this makes them not enlightened, but parrots. And fakers. And rule-followers trying very hard to stay in the box and do things right.

As opposed to transcending the box.

Not that there's anything wrong with this. It's just not a happy place for the seeker.

Because what is sought cannot be found this way. If it can be found at all.

Luckily not one bit of this matters.

Because the answer to, "Are you enlightened?" is a *yes* for everyone.

No one becomes enlightened, because everyone already is.

We are all, already, not the self.

Yes it's true this isn't "known." But knowing involves the mind. *Realizing*involves the mind.*("Realize" = makes real = Not it)*

So knowing isn't necessary, and changes nothing.

So… am I enlightened?

What's asking? What cares? And whatever it is, does it need to attain this realization?

Nah. It's complete already.

As are we all.

With or without

An Answer

To a useless question.

"What if you're a zombie right now and believing you're not is just one of the symptoms?"

~Jed McKenna

WHAT A MESS

December 10, 2019

"Neatness makes me feel like I have to be on my best behavior. Clutter is my natural habitat."

~Maggie Stiefvater

Maybe it's because the holidays are upon us that more people are contacting me to "work on" how to force themselves to be neater, cleaner, tidier.

Bad housekeepers are coming out of the undusted woodwork. Dishes sit in sinks, unfolded laundry piles up, dust settles on tabletops.

Also apparently lacking is the motivation to correct this grievous behavior.

So things are out of place all over the place. *(funny, because is "out of place" even possible?)*

Still, it is amazing how many folks are stressed out, guilty and shamed by the inability to keep a clean house.

Perhaps because everyone knows that a sloppy home "reflects" something about *us*. Unkempt home reflects unkempt self. Messy home reflects messy mind.

As usual, it's about us.

That rat's nest we call a home is no exception.

Untidy means we're bad, lazy, doing things wrong.

Never-mind that if we *did* clean, dust would settle right back on those counters the instant we stopped wiping them.

Because dust is the boss of dust.

Not us.

While we're busily saying, "Disarray is wrong," nature laughs.

Because nature adores a good mess. In fact nature *endorses* mess.

I mean, have you looked outside lately? There's dirt out there!

There is zero evidence that existence wants our homes clean.

So this human problem may be less about whether things are tidy,

And more about the attempt to impose our will and order and control on everything including environment.

We want to be the boss of all things and situations, including the mind, and then we want the power to make ourselves make all this happen.

Which is why we either spend vast amounts of our limited time here on this planet cleaning what nature immediately makes messy again…

Or we fail. Like the incompetent gods we are.

You can see why we hate chaos.

And why we find tidiness calming. Because all is right with the world when disorder is controlled and put in neat rows.

By *us*.

So yes, some folks run around stuffing things in closets and vacuuming and de-piling before company comes.

Hoping for a taste of ordered calm, and hoping that chaos won't expose them for the insignificant, easily-wiped-out, powerless flecks of dust they really are.

Now of course there's nothing wrong with any of this. I mean, if there's calm in a spotless home, then why not clean it.

It's just that by trying to impose order, we really are fighting *what is*.

It's a never-ending job, always requiring more. *(Though somehow when it comes to enlightenment, we expect one and done. Just saying. But I (sort of) digress.)*

Meanwhile, there could actually be more calm to be found in the willingness to let disorder be what it is, instead of continually fighting a losing battle.

And instead of imposing some weird human notions of rightness, power and fastidiousness.

Though I realize that the yelling, internal parental voice may not allow such willingness or acceptance.

Still, as always, *this is it*. And *it*- existence- consistently includes dirt and disarray.

Besides, noticed or not, order is already here. It just happens to include pet hair and scattered piles and disorganization.

So fighting grunginess less, and letting mess have us more, might bring a truer calm and a truthier truth.

Though either is as good a way to spend our life times as any.

We can't get this wrong.

Which is pretty darn

Neat

When we think about it.

And no scrubbing required.

"Chaos is always losing, but never defeated."

~Alan Watts

RECEIPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

December 24, 2019

"Better is the enemy of good enough."

~Voltaire

It's no secret this time of year is hard for a lot of folks.

Even if it's not that intense for you, or you're not annually looking for the exit, still, who doesn't have at least some nagging sadness, irritation, anxiousness, exhaustion, or regret this time of year?

No one, that's who.

Which makes total sense if you look at the recipe for adult existence that has become a holiday tradition for so many.

1). Expectation. Start with an empty bowl and fill it to the brim.

Everyone should have unrelenting happiness, love and joy. Family, party invitations, smiling, not too drunk faces- must-haves. Happy happy happy! Never mind that if there are people around, pretty likely they're the very ones that have perfected various button-pushes for years. Y'know, kind of like the annual sharpening of the spears.

2). Comparison. Mix in the whole bottle.

That family member is successful and you're not. That old flame is married and you're not. That one has kids, they still like their parents and they aren't addicted to whipped cream. You? No, no and no. Those others are fitter, younger, prettier, wealthier. They have all their hair, a savings account,

more parties, more friends. That one is enlightened, for crying out loud. You? Pfffft.

3) Self evaluation. Fold in a year's worth.

Look backward. That's always peaceful. How'd you do this year- is this the life you wanted at the end of 2019? Well, look at you alone, *again,* head deep in the pumpkin pie. Did you achieve, find true love, workout, get out of debt, do well as a parent? 'Course not.

Few of us measure up in the best of times, let alone at this time of "reflection." Aka, "Another year gone; what have I *done*." After all, odds are you're looking at pretty much the same failures as last year. And the year before that.

4) Future. Bake in those resolutions. Time to fix your life.

Look forward. Make a list of those plans for redemption. Even though you're probably just lining up your failures for next year's step 3 (see above), still, may as well start next holiday season's potential, "You blew it-s" early. Because c'mon, planning fix-its for the future can always be counted on to bring ease, peace and the end of anxiety. Right?

Mix steps 1 through 4 together thoroughly.

Mmmm. Smell the failure and tears along with strong whiskey and/or 420 at this point.

Now that's holiday winning!

And one miserable fruitcake. Not the concoction. You.

Is it any wonder the holidays are less than jolly for so many people? Could there be a more effectively ouch-filled recipe?

Although... if it's any consolation, despite thought saying, "It's just you," at least odds are good that everyone else is going through some version of the

exact same thing you are. While they're pretending to be joyful, of course. Just like you're doing.

Because for pretty much everyone, the condition of being human comes with thoughts of More, Not Good Enough, and Inadequate Life Accomplishments.

No matter what you've actually got, tried or accomplished.

So for a dash of something different, you might consider the following recipe...

Maybe You're Right Casserole.

It could be you've been right all along, and you are actually not enough. And no one else is either. First, because no one measures up to a fantasy existence where everything is only sweetness, with families singing joy-fueled carols without any glimpse of trigger, or where money, love, happiness, self-esteem and enlightenment are overly plentiful.

And second, because the self is nothing, and nothing can never, by definition, ever be enough.

Because it's *nothing*.

Nothing is the opposite of enough.

So rather than try so hard to attain not-possible ideals, maybe it's possible to relax into the relief of no-thing, without obligation to fill it with some-thing.

That would be a different kind of menu, one that might come with a side dish of learning to make do with… *this*. As it is.

Because your imperfect, messed-up-but-always-interesting personality might just be the ideal personification of what it is to be human.

Which means you fit right in. Perfectly imperfect as you are.

What a crazy concept!

Kinda sweet though. Like dessert. And you.

That's why I'm wishing you a giant slice of ‘So What, This Is Good Enough' pie.

With extra As-You-Are a la mode.

Yummm.

And it's why, from one fruitcake to another,

I'm also wishing you love,

and happy good enough.

"'What is the secret of your serenity?'"
Said the master: 'Wholehearted cooperation with the inevitable.'"

~Anthony De Mello

AGING?

January 7, 2020

"Why was I born, if it wasn't forever?"

~Ionesco

You're getting old.

Right now. Look at you. That body is deteriorating as we speak.

Whether you are 7 or 22 or 58 or 88, you're inexorably marching towards death.

It could happen at any moment. No matter how well the rules for health are followed, or if you smoke or eat the chip or lie like a sloth on the couch.

We all know this. Kind of.

Still we like to pretend "getting older" hasn't been happening since our birth. We pretend that it takes a while and then oldness hits all of a sudden- 40? 50? and Bam! Moisturizer. Sensible shoes. Posture exercises. Sweatpants.

Not to mention lack of sexual attractiveness, and invisibility. Because let's face it, we've relied for years on the supposed value of being seen and wanted. Value we've taken credit for, but actually have nothing to do with. I mean, whose doing is it if we are graced with beauty, or if others "want" us?

Not us.

And then along comes a day when we have to find some other tool to manipulate others to see these selves in a way we like.

Aging is a challenge to the story of who and what we are, a challenge to the image of the me.

Turns out that, rather than the body, it's actually the carefully crafted identity that demands our attention and intervention.

Which we hate.

And which is why, once we cross that arbitrary and varies-by-person number-threshold, aging is suddenly something we have to figure out how to *deal with*. We have to *come to terms*with it.

Because y'know, life hadn't been doing just fine without us dealing with aging so far. And of course existence needs us to be ok with, and needs our little brains to understand how, it does its job.

Making us vitally important.

Now *that,* we love. Enough to make it worth the discomfort of fretting about aging.

So we pretend that we control longevity. Just do things right- eat the kale, do the 5k, drink the spirulina kombucha- and we're promised the certainty of extended duration.

And if not, welcome to dying prematurely.

Though... "premature" according to whose timetable?

Meanwhile, to further confirm human's power over existence, let's mix in the requirement to live this life "to the fullest."

Whatever the hell that is.

Oh the pressure to make the most of this one wild and precious life.

As if a simple, "Hey look I'm alive!" isn't near enough. No, let's get busy *getting the mos*t out of it, for the longest possible amount of time.

Because humans aren't greedy at *all*.

Although…. if we knew we were dying tonight at 5pm, would we care about making the most of life?

With no time for big fat notable experiences, that sun on the chair might have to do. A nap. Typing an email. Sitting in a work conference. Packing boxes in a warehouse.

The mundane simplicity of *breathe in* and*breathe out* would be all we'd get.

Because no living creature is owed a grand experience.

So we might consider enjoying the crap out of whatever's here, instead of aiming for *better*, or demanding *more*, or taking ownership of what is clearly not ours.

Because it just might be that *getting the most out of life* actually means experiencing the enormity of...

the least of it.

Which happily might be more than enough. No matter what the age number involved.

So maybe there's no need to try to hoard life.

Especially since holding onto life, like holding one's breath, is a sure way to kill it.

So we breathe. Sleep. Feel. Drink. Eat.

Living *this*. As it is. In all its configurations.

It doesn't age.

It's as present, as *now,* as could be.

As is this body.

Until…

Next.

MISSING SOMETHING?

January 14, 2020

"All desire is a longing to come home."

~Tony Parsons

Raise your hand - who's feeling like something's missing?

How you doin' with love, friends, sex and connection? How about purpose? Who needs more money, health, or fun? Or enlightenment- you wouldn't turn that away, right? Or maybe just a little treat, a reward- a glass or three of wine, more books, bag of chips, full Oreo sleeve, another new pair of shoes?

I mean, when was the last time you felt 100% complete, satisfied, so totally whole that absolutely nothing, nothing, could possibly make it better?

Right.

Oh it's tough being human.

Something is always missing.

No matter how many books we buy.

And sometimes our sense of lack feels very strong, not ignorable. More often though, it's a vague, barely noticed, not definable, sense.

Whatever that is.

Something is Not. Quite. Right.

Always.

So naturally we try to pin it down. We call it loneliness and long for a partner to fix it. We assume we're damaged and turn to therapy or inquiry to fix it. We think we're not busy enough, successful enough, socially conscious enough, in which case productivity, money, or selfless acts of kindness will fix it.

And any or all of that might indeed quiet that sense of not-enoughness for a brief while. Though usually, very brief.

Because regardless of what all those love-yourself books in the positive-thinking section say,

To be human is to be incomplete. The self feels like it's not enough because it isn't enough.

Inherently.

Which makes sense, if only because, how could nothing ever be enough?

Turns out that the certainty that we're a separate distinct self feels like constant loss, missing out, denied access.

Which of course feels empty and disconnected.

Naturally we're going to want to fill up that emptiness with connection.

Though, because we don't have it, will have to be sought elsewhere. Somewhere other than, or outside, the self.

In another person, or thing, or idea. In a loving family, a better body, enlightenment, or wine.

None of which ever truly quenches the thirst.

So it starts to be clear, though this is usually unacknowledged, that we know the separate self is an illusion. We feel it. We feel the lack in this Me, and in other Me's too, and in every Me-we-think-we-are.

And we hope that somewhere out there is our wholeness- our tribe, our true selves, our fullness. If only we can get the right magic to connect with it.

Yoooooo hoooooo.

It's all we ever want. We seek it constantly.

This seeking is hidden in everything we do. Longing for connection with vastness, craving reconnection to enormity, truth, the not-pretend.

We yearn to get back to the garden.

We think we have left the garden.

Because we apply the same idea of separateness and distinctness of the self, to the vast wholeness.

So we come to think that everything is included in the vast except bad, inadequate, not-enough us.

Though that would make completeness not so dang complete now, wouldn't it?

No, completeness leaves nothing out, including inadequate us. Our individuality is absorbed into it.

We are already included at the wholeness party.

Realized or not.

Whooo hooo!

This is great news. Because it means the insufficient self does not have to be obliterated, or shifted, or killed off, or even transcended.

Which many seekers may find comforting. Especially in light of all those gurus saying the self has to die.

And also because it means that completeness,

being already here,

does not have to chased or attained.

Lucky us. We don't have to work so darned hard, and we get to have both- the sense of individual selfhood, and also the absolute completeness.

This leaves us with nothing to seek.

Because nothing is missing.

Unless maybe it's the sense

of missing

something.

And that,

I'm pretty sure,

won't be missed,

and we might be just as happy to

exclude.

I AM, ARE YOU?

January 21, 2020

"There was a young man who said, 'Though
It seems that I know that I know,
What I WOULD like to see
Is the "I" that knows "me"
When I KNOW that I know that I know.'"

~Alan Watts

Who am I? What am I?

Humans want to know.

We're not just mildly curious.

No. We are obsessed.

We want definitions, labels, understanding.

We turn to any source that discusses the subject. As long as they're talking about Who I Am, we listen earnestly and take notes.

There's astrology to tell us What We Are. Myers Briggs, IQ tests, Human Design, Tarot cards.

There are inquiries. Meditations. Lennnnnnnggtttthhhy facebook and satsang discourses. Books, podcasts, Elephant Journal articles. And don't forget the memes and inspirational sayings.

We let the apparent internal voice tell us Who We Are. That's always fun: "You're a loser. You're full of yourself. You're bad. A fraud. Unkind. Unlovable."

Yes, of course that hurts, but don't stop.

We even take on other people's opinions about Who We Are, too. Teacher: "Billy is an overly shy boy who isn't living up to his potential." Okay! Billy now not only knows Who He Is, he has fodder for talking about it endlessly in years of therapy. Yay!

So many options for finding out Who I Am!

We might almost come to think it matters.

The thing is, regardless what tools we use, and no matter how much we act as if Who I Am is fixed, definable, and permanent…

The bottom line is we don't dare take our eyes off the self for even an instant.

Because the only thing that holds I AM in place is attention.

Look away for even a moment and Poof!

Hello The Void, Ego Death, The Abyss, The Quickening, or whatever.

Gone.

Or at least, unfindable.

Not that it's actually ever been findable.

I mean, show me this ‘you.'

First there are points towards the body, as if that torso, collar bones or head is What We Are. As if we're skin, or the space in front of it.

Then comes, "Well it's the brain, or heart," as if, if we removed those organs and put them on a plate, that would be us sitting there in all our findable glory on the table.

Till finally we land on, "Well I don't know, there's just a*sense*of Me".

Like that's what we are- a "sense."

If so, it might be helpful to start by defining that ‘sense' first, since who knows what *that*is.

And we might also define what knows it's there, since senses tend not to know much about such things.

So perhaps it's becoming clearer that all this What Am I-obsession is simply an opportunity to define and reify and solidify a vague, airy concept.

The self story needs an anchor to hold it. Stewing about Who Am I is such an anchor.

Not that there's anything wrong with devoting our lives to defining something that isn't there.

It's just that, if we're seeking to see through the self, as so many lovely Mind-Tickler readers strive to do, how can that possibly happen,

If we're attempting to pin down a wispy nothing by pretending we can study or question it into existence?

So just to try something different, maybe we could tear ourselves away from the mirror, and, rather than ask, "Who am I?" we could play a bit with asking, "Where?"

We might find, as we briefly did above, that there's no provable location to be found.

We might even find that we're the question itself, and the thought, and the feeling, and the sensation, and the color, and the sound, and every experience itself.

And that there's no*I*at all, doing this experiencing.

So it could be there's no need to figure out who we are.

Since we're all of it.

That's a whole lot bigger than any little identified self concept.

And might even be enough to make the self happy.

I mean, probably not.

But it's at least possible that being everything makes up for the self's disappointment about being nothing.

And might be more than fair compensation for

I Am Not.

"My child, you can talk about holy books all you like. But until you forget everything, you will never find yourself."

~Ashtavakra Gita

"The game is not about becoming somebody, it's about becoming nobody."

~Ram Dass

SO. MUCH. EFFORT.

February 11, 2020

"If you work hard, strive to become the best version of yourself, surround yourself with inspirational people and never give up, then there is no limit to how exhausted you can become."

~Svend Brinkmann

My friend keeps a list of her thoughts. She wants to be aware of them and not get caught up in her story. She wants to figure out what brought on feelings xyz so that they don't control her. She wants to get outside her self.

Like almost everyone else, she thinks she needs to work at this be-your-best-self thing. She tries hard to do it right.

Because she wants peace.

She's certainly not alone. It's an almost universal idea that if we work hard, we can find the right technique/ approach/ enlightenment, and then all the struggle will go away and we will never be bothered by anything ever again.

Unsurprisingly, we're tired.

Really, really, tired.

I mean, it could be that what many of us call "unmotivated" is simply exhaustion.

Because in order to get on top of enlightenment and self improvement, to stay peaceful and not get triggered when the boss is unfair, or to not worry

about money or health or the kids' future, to be kinder and less reactive…

We have to watch our selves. Constantly.

"How am I doing? Is this good? Is this ok? Can I fix it? Can I figure out what's happening and then make it stop? Am I happy? Should I do more? Less? Am I messing up? Am I not enlightened/peaceful/happy because I'm doing things wrong?"

Watching, evaluating, critiquing, defending. The review of our selves is non-stop.

All in an attempt to be more at ease.

We wacky humans think we can attain an effortless state by using vast amounts of effort.

Somehow not noticing that all that hard work only yields more hard work.

With no end. Because there's always more self-consciousness.

Phew. Who needs a nap?

This is what happens when we think we are a self.

That sucker needs bolstering, propping up, and maintenance. Otherwise it tips over like the unsubstantial, non-existent thing it is.

So hello meditations, satsangs, inquiries, therapies, workouts, somatic work, self-help books, affirmations.

And the funny thing is, what's doing all this watching, evaluating, disapproving, and determining what needs more work?

The me, that's what. Being "aware of itself," pretending to be an outside thing other than itself, policing itself, attempting to dissolve…

its own self.

Um… what?

We're trying to be conscious of the mind, by using the mind to do it.

Boys and girls, can you say, "Unwinnable game?"

And meanwhile, though mind appears to busily work on these very important projects, happily having something to solve, perhaps not-so-secretly,

it really likes things just fine as they are.

Because with all that smokescreen effort, it never has to be seen as not actually there at all.

We can begin to see how we might need tons of recovery time, and tons of, *"Sorry-I-can't-go-out-I-have-something-very-important-to-do"-while-actually-hunkered-down-in-bed,*time.

Fine, so what's the alternative? What can we do about all this?

Funny question, that. Because it conveniently misses that the focus on what we can do actually adds another layer of effort to an already over-burdened existence.

"I have to do something about all this trying to do something."

Focus on doing something about all the efforting is just more efforting.

It's a trickster, the mind.

Maybe we don't have to do anything. Maybe we can just let all that self-monitoring go for a bit and just be.

As is.

Which of course, after spending lifetimes trying to improve, most of us have absolutely no idea how to "do."

So then we might simply notice that we find existing without effort to be effortful.

Because just noticing the game often allows an ease can come,*on its own*.

Requiring no effort.

And though perhaps this possibility feels alien and maybe even alarming-

because after all, what happens to mind and self if there's nothing to think *about?*-

Luckily for our exhausted selves,

Ease, like sleep, comes on its own.

It can't be forced or manufactured.

So we don't have to do anything to make it come.

All we might do is notice.

And really maybe

not even that.

"When you try to stay on the surface of the water, you sink; but when you try to sink, you float."

~Alan Watts

"The only real rest comes when you're alone with god."

~Rumi

INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY?

February 18, 2020

See that painting? It could be said that I painted that this weekend.

I mean, it did indeed seem to come from my hands and brush, as I enjoyed, for the second time, a most amazing painting workshop *(**details below if that interests you)*.

But I'm not including it here because I think it's Great Art. I'm including it here because I didn't paint it.

Yes, I began by trying hard to make a good and worthwhile painting. And yes as a result, I started out careful, uptight, and proper.

Because I'm human (in case you were wondering.) And most humans think that if we're going to do a thing at all, we had dang well better be good at it.

Sing on key or don't sing, dance well or sit this one out, be good at the sport, the relationship, the writing, the "inner work," or else stop it, and be ashamed of your lack of skill and the foolishness of even trying.

So most of us don't even attempt to do things we're not good at. Not comfortably, that's for sure.

Because doing anything becomes all about being seen.

As a self.

A good or bad self.

And that convoluted center of all things is maintained by constant attention, constant comparison and constant evaluation of its performance.

Performance being the operative word. The self is play-acting for an audience at all times.

So it had better be good.

We spend lifetimes polishing this presentation. We can't afford for some ridiculous incompetence to just waltz in and destroy all that carefully-honed image-making.

Which is why, as I looked around in this weekend's workshop, all the participants were frozen to some degree. Everyone, even the professional artists, despairing of looking foolish, paralyzed by possible inadequacy, furtively glancing around to see if others were better at this than they.

Never-mind that all of the work in that room was fascinating, even from the most basic beginners.

And then luckily for me, creativity said, "Ok that's enough, honey. Move over and hand me the brush."

Creativity, consciousness, ideas, wisdom, Source, God, love, spirit, awareness…

Many different words, all the same stuff.

It wanted to paint. Its way, its colors, its ideas.

I didn't have to let it, of course. I could have overridden when I quite clearly heard, "Keep going" after I was positive this painting was done.

But besides how very off that would have felt, how dumb would that have been?

Because unlike Judy, consciousness has vast, limitless ideas, knows how to play, and isn't careful or afraid of wrongness.

What fool would shut that down?

So Judy got out of the way and something bigger played with paint.

And it became very clear that Judy doing a "good" painting or liking it or looking good to others was irrelevant and completely not the plan.

In fact, for me to evaluate and critique as usual, or even to say, "Yeah it's not great but…"

would have been just plain *rude*.

It wasn't my painting and none of my business whether I liked it or not.

So it painted. Long after others started new pages.

Now, full disclosure- Judy got high from this take-over. Totally blissed out.

Sounds weird, maybe, and perhaps it is. The thing is…

What do we think integrating spirituality into everyday life looks like?

Does enlightenment, whatever that may be, require withdrawal from our world?

"Bye kids, there's snacks in the fridge, I'm off to the cave forever?"

Maybe enlightenment exists right here in this world, in this existence, as it is, at all times.

With all its complexities and sports failures and lack of money and fights with the spouse. With all the computer watching and golf and music making and laughing and kissing and holding the paint brush…

Living, in it and also, not. Inside this life and also, outside.

Both. And. Including.

Painting with us, painting through us.

We are the painting, the paint, and the hand moving the brush.

Not that consciousness needs us to know this.

Which is why life goes on.

As is.

As art.

As a painting,

Making itself.

** *The Painting Experience:https://www.processarts.com*

"Creativity is Intelligence, having fun."

~Albert Einstein

"If you want to surrender to creativity, surrender to creation."

~Judith Orloff

PERSONALITIES R US

February 25, 2020

I remember being shocked to learn about my teacher's view of me in kindergarten. She told my mom I was shy, quiet, and gentle.

Who? Me?

This was certainly not how I saw my self. It was not how my mother saw me either. We both knew me to be loud, smart-alecky, and obnoxious. I mean, adorable of course, but still...

Which is perhaps why mom suggested that I be a little more like that at home.

And now today, at the ripe old age of (*cough), well, those personality styles seem to have reversed. Friends today know me as effusive, loud and goofy in person. Alone at home, I'm hunkered down and still.

Which is the true authentic me?

I mean, surely there is one. Surely there is one true one of all of us. And whichever of our many facets is the authentic one, aren't we supposed to be that, consistently and all the time?

But... "authentic me" changes regularly depending on context.

So looks like we can add "bad" and "wrong" to the list of applicable personality traits.

Weird. I mean, how many mes are there?

Oh mighty astrology chart, Myers Briggs, Enneagram, therapist, or inquiry, tell us who we are. Tell us over an dover, all about our selves and our

personalities.

It feels important.

So it's surprising that with all this scrutiny, most of us haven't noticed that we have to turn to outside our self, out towards others' opinions and personality tests, in order to be able to shine that mirror back, on us.

Teachers report what they see. Mothers tell us what they see. Myers Briggs tells us what it sees.

These are views of us. They're not actually us.

And then based on that viewing input, ignoring all the contradictions and don't-go-togethers, a story gets sewn together about each individual's personality.

Description of identity and personality is dependent on the outside world. Otherwise there's zero basis for defining what we are.

We cannot see ourselves without that input.

Which makes us a reflection. Of them, not us. Because it's their mirror, not ours.

Not that that detail stops us from trying to claim ownership. After all, we all know it's our personality.

MINE. My personality.

Personality is the personal property of….well, what?

Who and where is this owner of us and "ours"? What makes this collection of attributes mine?

That ownership indicates distance, space, between the thing that is owned- the personality- and the owners- us.

"This is mine" indicates we are not this.

So what are we then?

I mean, even if we're a reflected image, where's the original that's being reflected? Let's get a look at that baby.

Seems it can't be done.

And yet for everyone, no matter how enlightened, the sense of being a distinctive person with a unique combination of attributes carries on regardless.

I mean, even Adya has a personality. Krishnamurti, Parsons, Watts, Spira… no one would mix them up, confuse them for each other. Their unique collection of characteristics continues.

Personality describes A Person. Since that isn't real, we have to depend on description to make it seem like a thing.

Which is why, whatever those identifying characteristics may be for each of us, they or some other replacing traits, will continue. They're not going anywhere.

Despite all those spiritual admonitions about ego and personality having to "die before you die."

The thing is, what needs personality gone, anyway? What benefit would there be to excluding it, or to making vanish, even if that was possible?

Maybe we don't have to try so hard to get rid of, or transcend, or transform personality.

Maybe we can be free of shoulds and wagging fingers enough to be allow our selves to be whimsical, changing, arbitrary, contradictory, difficult and unreasonable. Without constant monitoring, correcting, and polishing.

Maybe we can just leave it alone and finally just have fun with playacting, dressing up, and costume makeup instead.

Because if we're going to spend so much time "seeing ourselves", we may as well enjoy the play or film.

Since whatever watches has no personality, no ego, no mind, and no body of its own.

So it very well may enjoy the hell out of ours.

"Hey kids, come on! Movie's on!"

What entertainment. What variety. What ingenuity.

What a fun

and fascinating

show.

"You have a nice personality, but not for a human being."

~Henny Youngman

VIRUS ALERT

March 10, 2020

Of course I have to write about it– too many folks have asked.

Whispers faintly: **_The coronavirus_**

Danger! Fix, plan, solve, do!

Quarantines. Plummeting retirement funds. Closed schools, canceled planes, shuttered stores.

Feel the fear? If not, it'll come eventually. Because we humans love fear. We wouldn't miss this great opportunity for a bunch of it.

Unlike my cat, for example, who sits in the sun and only gets scared when and if the occasion merits. She doesn't waste a good fear on something that hasn't happened yet.

Whereas humans seek fear out. We plan in advance, anticipating death and various not-happened-yet problems, making sure we have "done everything"…

…Sanitizer. Hand washing while singing 20-second songs. Shopping runs on Costco. Masks. Vitamins. Water. Zinc. Disposable gloves…

All in an attempt to avoid whatever existence has in store for us.

Nevermind that whether we do everything right or not, It does what it wants.

We wash our hands and never leave the house and drink apple cider vinegar, and still pick up a soup can that has had some little germ sitting on it for the last 7 days, since the stock boy- who felt fine with no symptoms

and had no idea he carried the virus- loaded cans onto the shelves and boom- hello, not feeling well.

Or maybe the mailman sneezed on our mail. The terror is that we don't know. Coronavirus lives for up to 10 days on surfaces. There's no practical way of stopping it.

Luckily for our time management, stopping a virus, if it wants to come, is not up to us.

After all, what do we think, "*I'm not the doer*" means, in real life?

This is what it means. It means if it's time to get sick, we're getting sick.

Existence has got its own mind.

How wonderful for us that we are provided this excellent reminder of a common and supposedly important spiritual truth.

Of course, this is not to say don't take reasonable precautions. I mean, why wouldn't we? Maybe it helps, maybe it doesn't.

What surely doesn't help is grasping for control we don't have. There is nothing in that but frustration and fear.

What doesn't help is fretting about death and how to make our selves safe from it.

Because all we want is to make this life indefinitely longer.

I mean, it's probably not news that death is coming. For most folks, the panic is about when.

We think we're owed 70-100 years. We even call dying before that, "premature."

Because the self is what matters. The self must go on.

But when it's time to go, it's time to go.

Now of course we don't ever have to accept this. And I'm not going to tell anyone to not be afraid.

It's just that, ironically, all those efforts to prolong the self may actually make its available time here unhappy, back-burnering peace, fun, and contentment.

Which seems kind of crazy, that we might diminish the quality of the very life we want to hold onto so badly, simply in order to get it to last longer.

Because if quality was more of a priority to us than extending this self's existence, we might focus on enjoying living these lives, as they are, in peace.

We might still follow any prescriptions for dealing with an epidemic, and perhaps also go to the dance, take the vacation, hug the friend.

What a concept, accepting existence as it is and not having a tantrum about it. What a concept, surrendering instead of fighting to hoard more minutes.

So is coronavirus coming to a neighborhood, school, hospital, ball park or airplane near us? Pretty likely, yes.

Will it affect things, close things, bring loss and other things no one wants? Also pretty likely.

Disruption of our human plans is probably a given.

We don't have to like it.

It is what it is anyway.

Despite our pre-cautions

And our constant yearning

for more

foreverness

of this

scared

and dissatisfied

and ever so important

self.

"Thought breeds fear."

~Nisaragdatta

"You can't live at all,
Unless you can live fully
Now."

~Alan Watts

BE AFRAID

March 24, 2020

"Even though I am in bed, I am Buddha. So, don't worry about my health."

~Shunryu Suzuki

Stay calm, don't be afraid, don't panic, don't be overcome by fear.

We can do this! Fear doesn't have to beat us!

There is certainly no lack of cheerleading telling us to not be afraid, is there?

There are plenty of good reasons to want to get rid of fear too, as we hear about its many negative effects and dire consequences. It's certainly important that we study and learn ways to vanquish it.

Fear is bad, n'kay?

Never mind that at the same time, the unending focus on panic has increased -- memes, daily counts of the dead, bar charts comparing this to that. So many pictures of sick folks literally lining the floors in hospitals all over the world. Look at it all!

But stop it. Be calm. No fear.

I don't know about you but here in quarantine in my own home, the trash bin shows increased evidence of comfort eating, along with the usually-not-but-now-worrisome envelopes from bill statements, as reports continually feature the enormous financial ruin accompanying all that death.

And it's not even as if we can turn to our usual ways of managing fear.

Overeating isn't necessarily an option (the food's gotta last), many aren't working, alcohol and marijuana aren't readily available. Shopping, exercise, escaping the kids and spouse - no longer so easy. Religious places closed, parties, bars…

When we think about it, what's left to get the juices going but fear? For many folks, it's all that's left to make this life interesting right now.

So here's a scandalous proposal...

Why not just be afraid? Go for it.

I mean, yes, we don't like it.

But if we could think from consciousness' point of view, or from "the witness' " point of view…

Isn't fear equally as fascinating as love or boredom or shame?

Isn't it possible that if humans could expand perspective out from our own navels for a bit, we might discover that other than Don't like,

Fear may be turn out to be just as good a feeling as any other?

That may already feel like a relief. Since being allowed to be what we are is so much less work than fighting it.

Besides, it could be that no matter what meditation, affirmations, "we can do its", inquiries, or intentions we may try…

At some point fear is simply unavoidable anyway.

I saw this myself 10 days ago when I couldn't breathe.

No amount of meditation or enlightenment stops the automatic response of the self to want its own infinite, never-ending survival.

Yes we fear losing what we think we know, what we think we have, and the long-held delusion that we've been in control.

But most of all we fear losing life, this personal story of individual-me. The self greatly fears that it will cease to be. It wants to stay.

Unsurprisingly the self finds the possibility of its own vanishing, alarming. That alarm is not going to disappear just because we say, "We can do this!"

So even if it turns out that What We Truly Are does continue to exist after the self-story is gone,

And even if that might also be calming for the self in the here and now,

Regardless…

Fear is built in as part of this human existence.

Now to be clear, I'm not saying embrace it, I'm not saying sit with it, I'm not saying wallow. I'm also not saying diminish, bypass, or ignore it.

I'm just saying fight fear or not, try to make fear vanish or not…

When it wants to be, there it is, anyway.

The rapid heartbeat, the sense of shallow breathing, the racing thoughts and images of nothingness.

Yes.

Maybe this is the end. Maybe it isn't.

Maybe we're afraid. Maybe we're very afraid.

Either way, maybe

as an experience,

as it is,

it can be

enough.

PS: ❤️ I wish you health, if possible, and a richly-felt experience, and all my hopes that this ride may continue for you for a good while longer. ❤️

"Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?"

~Tolstoy

"This parrot is no more. It has ceased to be. It is bereft of life. It rests in peace. This, is an ex parrot."

~Monty Python

GIVING EXPERIENCE THE BIRD

March 31, 2020

"The ground submits to the sky and suffers whatever comes. Tell me,
is the Earth worse for giving in like that?"

~Rumi

My mom used to keep a bird feeder on her patio deck. The funny wrens and adorable chickadees flocked to the feeder, flittered about, enjoyed a meal, then flew happily off.

One day a large hawk sat intently on the deck bannister waiting for these little visitors, to eat them for its own meal.

"Oh no!" I said. "I'll go chase him off!" And my mother said, "Leave them be. This is part of it too. Nature is cruel."

Oh.

But, but… cute! But sweet! But please, not death, not suffering, not terror.

Please?

C'mon, life, give us positivity, smiles, happiness.

Only.

No hawks! Chickadees only!

I mean, what could existence be thinking, coming up with a system like this? How can it be so wrong, so mean, so painful?

Maybe existence needs to take a positive-thinking workshop, a find-your-bliss retreat, an enlightenment program, 'til it sees the error of its ways and gets things rightly happy.

That's what all my friends are doing through this social lockdown- trying to banish anxiety by taking positive-only zoom classes from body workers who are suddenly experts on absolutely everything, or joining life-coach pep rallies- I mean workshops- to get everyone all revved up with we-can-do-it! energy.

Though to be honest, at the same time, most of them are indulging in larger-than usual comfort quantities of food, wine, pot, TV, panic, self-hatred and despair.

Which of course is also unacceptable and also an error of existence.

But in these times of alone-at-home, folks are pretty sure they'd go crazy without all that, so never mind.

We humans reject vast amounts of experience.

Happy and calm- yes. Fear and sadness- No.

That constant rejection of everything painful might possibly create a lot of the emptiness that ends up needing to be filled with all those sugar highs and sedations. As opposed to being the result of it.

Still, we're pretty clear about what we want. Go team bliss calm contentment!

So it's kind of odd that we haven't have noticed that all that pushed smiley positivity is not at all peaceful.

And it's odd that we also haven't noticed that acknowledging the reality of helplessness, surrendering to the possibility that there's nothing we can do and that relentless good cheer is not going to save us… actually is peaceful.

Now to be fair, most of us have never even considered surrender to the less-than-happy.

So we couldn't have noticed that it's the opposite of rejecting all negativity, the opposite of trying to force existence to play nice, that can actually bring the calm and better feelings we've been so hungry for, for so long.

Meanwhile, enlightenment fans do the exact same kind of experience-rejection.

Even when it's possible that accepting distress and unhappiness actually might offer a different, more direct way to the transcendence also earnestly desired.

Wouldn't it be something if all those panic attacks and dark nights of the soul actually contained what's been sought, rather than blocking the way.

Because if we're consciousness, experiencing itself, and wanting it all, then that includes every feeling, every thought, every color.

Every experience.

Hawk AND chickadee.

As opposed to little ol' us rejecting inclusive vastness because we think that this limited self, with its insistence on bliss and calm only, is what we are.

'Course this human rejection doesn't hurt vastness one bit.

It does hurt for us, though.

So just for fun, we might try on the possibility of BEING every sensation, being every sound, being every thought, and laughter, and tear.

Being experience itself, rather than the one with all the preferences for nice feelings.

Rather than the one all this happens to, or even the one who notices.

We might begin to notice our usual sense of self, our everyday, I'm-right-here sense, disappear. We might begin to notice the typical demands of the mind go quieter.

Since we are those too.

As the sense of ME dissolves into everything.

And also. And yet. And still, our usual lifelong, self-long preference for happiness over pain continues.

And the enormous experience that we are ...

actually coexists with and includes that self story.

BEING and including all that too.

So we can be clear that this different, bigger BEING experience is not better than any other, either.

No point in substituting one demand on life for another demand on life.

But thinking that what we are is a self rather than existence, hurts.

Seeing we're not that self, feels better.

Which is what we've wanted all along from all that cheery focus on bliss, positivity and happiness.

And paradoxically,

that just might make us

happy little chickadees.

"We have tried everything to get rid of suffering. Finally, when one has tried enough, there arises the willingness to stop the futile attempt to get rid of it and, instead, to actually experience suffering. In that instant, there is the realization of that which is beyond suffering, of that which is untouched by suffering. There is the realization of who one truly is."

~Gangaji

"God is trying to sell you something, but you don't want to buy. That is what your suffering is: Your fantastic haggling, your manic screaming over the price."

~Hafiz

LIFE WHILE LIVING

April 7, 2020

"Delusion is the spice of life. Without that, there are no love stories or shoot-em-ups or sitcoms, just twenty-four hour nature programming."

~Jed McKenna

"I'm nothing, and yet I'm all I can think about."

~William Hamilton

*Psssst. There's a virus going around.

Just thought I'd update you in case you weren't aware.

Perhaps you've noticed that The Mind-Tickler and my Facebook entries appear to have taken a slight breather from focusing on the woo, the consciousness, the awareness, the bigger-picture ideas that we generally play with here.

Not because that's necessary, or because our little focus can change the course of viruses or enlightenment or any other thing.

But more because the intensity of being human has been hopping up and down, waving its arms, screaming and demanding attention.

So I figure maybe we should give it some. I mean, why not?

Sure, all the spiritual gurus talk about putting our attention on things much grander than our selves.

And sure, generally The Mind-Tickler likes to do that as much as the next guy.

Especially since being human, we are told, with all its constant thinking, feeling, and smallness of mind, needs to be transcended and ideally, done away with, in order for us to attain true connection with What Is, with Awareness.

So thought, be gone. Ego? Certainly not. Mind? No way.

But it is kind of weird when we think about it. First because what is so terrible about existing with this humanity? Doesn't consciousness include that too, along with everything else?

And second, what is it that makes so-called connection with consciousness better, preferable, to the human experience of the individual?

What makes one experience exalted, and one rejected?

Human preference, that's what.

Preference for peace, light, spaciousness and happy feelings. Rejection of pain, darkness, fear, and aggravation.

Though those are wants, likes, desires.

Which means, even the desire for enlightenment and "connection with consciousness," is a human thing.

Just more ego, claiming to want to do away with itself.

And we can't help but also notice that, for all the talk of killing the ego and transcending mind, few (if any) seem to be able to actually do it.

I mean, who has no ego, no personality, no human self?

Even the sainted Ramana was still Ramana.

Turns out that no matter how vaporously enlightened and transcendent any of us may become, even if Ramana-level realized, as long as we're alive, we remain human too.

Now, it is true that it is painful to be an individual. And that being an individual requires the body.

Can't be a body without being a person. Can't be a person without a body.

So yes we hurt, and yes we yearn for an enlightenment where hurting will cease to be an issue.

And yes we look earnestly for ways we can have all the cake- have the body, have the life, and just lose only the personhood.

While actually having no interest in truly losing the body, losing the brain, losing functioning and the ability to pay the bills and get the jokes.

So the virus raises fears, and the individual self is loudly front and center these days.

Because this virus has the potential to remove ALL our personhood- the body, the ego, and even the self's awareness of itself.

And that's a major Do Not Like.

No matter how many satsangs and inquiries and podcasts, the human does not want to die.

In fact, in general we're obsessed with the self being able to continue on continuing,

FOREVER.

Anything less is "stressful." Anything less inspires fear.

Now of course we know that the self disappears eventually, and that no matter what we do or realize, each person comes and goes, taking our brief little stories with us as we exit.

Why is why we might want to experience all the drama, all the crazy, all the pathos, while we can.

We might want to relish lockdown, and possible irritation with family, and cuddles and isolation and hunger and overstuffedness. We might want to guffaw at a zillion stupid memes, and cry for our losses, and be productive or lazy or creative or bored.

Because all of that is what makes this whole story so interesting, and is so much a part of why we don't want it to end.

Ego is the spice, the juice, the fun.

This movie is amazing.

And when/if it starts to feel like too much intensity, sure, we can turn our attention to what can't die, to what isn't self, to what is vastly bigger than we are.

Why not do that, too?

Look at us, having it all.

The human still here, even then.

Until it's not.

One way or the other, at some point the self dies, the ego expires, taking the meat suit with it on the way out.

Virus or no virus. Enlightenment or no enlightenment.

And still at all times, we get to have nothing and everything, bigness and smallness, vastness and ego, peace and pain.

Seems kind of amazing

And incredibly generous

to be able to have it,

and be able to be it

all.

"Realization consists of getting rid of the false idea that one is not realized."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Death has nothing to do with going away.
The sun sets. The moon sets.
But they are not gone."

~Rumi

PEACE OUT OF PAIN

April 14, 2020

They speak hesitantly, in small voices. Glancing down, in online classes, in zoom visits with family and friends, in groups, in private sessions, they admit their secret:

"I feel good."

Quietly. They don't want to confess it out loud.

"I know I shouldn't in these terrible times but…"

What they don't realize is how many of them there are.

A whole lot of people are content. A whole lot of people have discovered a kind of peace in the midst of a terrifying pandemic.

Dare we say it? They're... happy.

But people are dying. How can anyone feel good?

And if we can get over the judgments ("What kind of sociopath feels good now?"),

We might notice the subtle but absolute demand that everyone must suffer if anyone does.

We might notice that, when pain exists anywhere, we think it is wrong and inappropriate for anyone to feel good.

Even though so many do.

When it could be that feeling content right now actually makes sense.

I mean, get past the guilt of feeling lighter, and we can start to see that we've been given a no-choice, long-overdue, break.

Key words being "no-choice". It's no-fault downtime.

Suddenly we're allowed to be unsocial without having to make up lies for not wanting to go out. Suddenly we're allowed to not work without being labeled as failures. We're allowed to not get things done, to not use our time "wisely."

Suddenly, perhaps for the first time ever, we have permission, hell we're even required, to be quiet, alone, and unproductive.

And it's not even our fault!

This is not typical.

Since ordinarily the mind loves to blame us for happenings, for outcomes, for causing pain. It tells us we are mighty in our power to screw up absolutely everything.

And this power, this supposed responsibility to control, conveniently makes everything about the self, the Me. Me is at the center of every situation. "I brought this on, I did this wrong or right, I deserve this outcome."

Me did this.

Through guilt, blame, responsibility, and punishment, the self firms up its sense of importance and reality.

And now that can't happen. Try as it might- and oh it does- the mind can't make a global pandemic our fault.

So a key bit of self-reification is relaxed. Which feels odd. Strangely calm.

Since the stronger the sense of, "This is me, I am here," the more suffering. Relax that, and ahhhhh, blessed relief.

Plus, we're not alone in this. Everyone has company in this isolation. Everyone is in the same boat.

Which reveals a kind of connection to others, to earth, to the everything, that in usual daily life gets lost in the certainty of separateness and individuality.

That's a reluctant, not even-trying, additional bit of relaxation of the sense of distinct, personal, self.

It feels good.

Now of course not everything's perfect. If it isn't family driving us nuts, it's the isolation of living alone, or it's money, or physical health, or concern for loved ones not isolating in the same home as we are.

And of course the mind is never silent. It simply moves its scolding to making "good use" of the downtime, coming up with new reasons for blame and guilt, as its demands for us to be productive, lose weight, get fit, learn a language or whatever, fail to materialize.

Bad us. Bad weight-up, fitness-disappearing, indulging-too-much and getting-nothing-done, us.

So clearly this new contentment isn't about affirmations or Pollyanna positivity.

It's more about being allowed to feel good, even if not everyone does.

Because one person's contentment doesn't negate or discount anyone else's pain. So why would that pain be expected to nullify another's happiness?

Besides, it could be we are capable of feeling compassion for others, empathy for their pain, and also our own contentment. It could be we can encompass both, not just one or the other.

And it could be peace and contentment do have a place, even if bad things are happening.

Maybe there's room for all experiences in this world.

Who knows, we may discover that we can derive that all-important sense of self we are so attached to, out of good feelings too, not just out of bad ones.

That would be the ultimate in self-ish.

As in, self-like. As in, similar to self.

That would make quite a gift out of the pain of this pandemic.

I mean, wouldn't it be something if,

out of that pain,

we found

peace?

"Ever since happiness heard your name, it has been running through the streets trying to find you."

~Hafiz

FILL 'ER UP!

April 21, 2020

I started a diet today- kind of a cleanse, with not much food involved for a while. Because Judy's been bulking up a bit.

Snacking and my pants size (if I wore them anymore) have jumped up a few notches these past few weeks. There's been lots of mindless all-day filling up, in a way that wasn't formerly necessary.

Y'know, back in those glorious olden days when humans were free to roam the land.

Apparently quarantine comes with a strong pull to become more... substantial.

It's not comfort that's been sought. I am incredibly lucky to have no particular need for comfort these days. Life is good. I have a roof over my head, a car I hopefully remember to start once a week. I get to be both happily alone, and also quite busy with clients and painting and solo-practice dancing and socializing online.

So it's not as if there's been no other way to fill the time than to work the ol' biceps with a strong hand-to-mouth action.

And yet…

Even with all this plenty, in quarantine the sense of deprivation, of not-enough, is strong anyway.

Movement, travel, restaurants, dancing, hugs. There's no lack of lack these days.

It's enough to make a girl hungry.

Or pretend she is, anyway. Because no one could eat this much and still be hungry.

So clearly it's not food that's wanted.

Perhaps all that chowing is about what is not wanted.

Emptiness.

We humans hate empty. We want to be filled, and ful-filled. Overstuffed and overflowing- even better.

More please.

More food, more wine, more money, more sex, more happiness. More love, health, control, safety, life expectancy, enlightenment.

Just fill ‘er up, dammit.

Attempting to avoid emptiness has become a defining characteristic of being human. Everything we do- addictions, productivity, pleasures, the arts- is an attempt to distract from it.

Every action, even just lying on the couch, attemptss to sidestep emptiness, defining us more, identifying who we are, and narrowing the possibilities of this particular existence.

Which seems to make us very here. And we're all for that. We're good with grounded, real, solid.

Just as long as we're not nothing.

Nothing is bad, n'kay?

And nothing is what emptiness appears to be.

Void, abyss, black hole? No thanks.

So instead, let's get busy anchoring this self in addictions, feelings, likes, and wants. Pass the tissues, the cookies, the wine.

All of which successfully keeps us from noticing that we also yearn for the wispy not-hereness of nothing.

We long for that peace.

Also.

Great, another thing we don't have enough of.

I mean yes, we don't want to lose the self, ever. At the same time, the self is the thing we hate, the thing we scan for abnormalities and want to fix. The self is what isn't good enough and always needs more.

Whereas emptiness is vast and spacious and always, always enough.

So yeah, we want it. We want enoughness. We just think pleasure and filling-up can get it for us.

When it's actually the lack, the emptiness, that pulls us out of self and connects us with spaciousness. It's actually the absence of self which provides the fullness and peace that we have so longed for.

I mean, who knew that the sense of self dissolves into the nothing that it is, when it's not

FED

by pleasure, by seeking, by filling, by more?

So yes, I'm on a diet.

Because emptiness is not empty.

Empty is full of full,

full of wow,

full of vastness,

In a way no chocolate or wine is ever going to satisfy.

Welcome, emptiness.

I'd say, "Pull up a chair,"

but you don't need one.

"There's hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness.
We are lutes, no more no less. If the soundbox is stuffed full of anything, no music.
If the brain and the belly are burning clean
with fasting, every moment a new song comes out of the fire...
Be emptier and cry like reed instruments cry."

~Rumi

UGH- THIS IS IT?

April 28, 2020

"Stop acting so small. You are the universe in ecstatic motion."

~Rumi

Disciple: "Sir, I want to get liberated."
Ramana: "You Are Ever Liberated."

~Ramana Maharshi

Curtain opens. Scene begins.

Client: I have an intense curiosity in this enlightenment stuff.

Judy: Ok! What for? What do you think it's going to do for you?

C: I think it involves relief, a safe haven from suffering. I yearn for understanding.

J: So "understanding" will help you to not suffer anymore?

C: Yes

J: Ever? So like if your child dies, no reaction?

C: Well…

J: Sounds like valium.

C: In a way I guess.

J: Why not just take valium? It's quicker and more reliable.

C: I just want to know what people are talking about.

J: I get it, you're missing out on something wonderful! So who are these people who are talking about this fabulous state you don't have?

C: Well, you. And (another writer.)

J: Me? But I say repeatedly, in no uncertain terms, "This is it." (The other writer) does also. We both use those exact words. How does *This is it* come to mean there's some other *It* than this, some magical, happier *It* that you're missing out on?

"This is it," turns into, "Yeah I like what Judy says. Judy has a different, better It than I have. She can help me not suffer." Is that correct?

C: Well,

J: Ok, so, do you think consciousness includes suffering? Or does consciousness include everything except that?

C- No, it's all included.

J: And, is there anyone who doesn't suffer sometimes?

C: No, everyone suffers.

J: OK, so there's no evidence that not-suffering is even possible, and consciousness includes it all.

Yet you'd rather reject the experience that's here already anyway, because it includes suffering, to yearn for an imagined *not-here* which excludes suffering.

Even though consciousness *includes* what you want to *exclude*.

Gosh, I can't imagine why you haven't found what you're searching for.

End scene.

Whew.

It is astonishing how many conversations like this I have.

All over the world, within all kinds of so-called spiritual approaches…

People are trying to make consciousness small.

People are trying to squeeze consciousness down to something smaller than themselves, in order to contain and handle all that enormity.

By leaving out the suffering. By leaving out the anger, fear, pain, shame, guilt, resistance.

Thereby paring down incomprehensible inclusiveness to a more manageable size.

Somehow we've come to believe that we can dictate our preferred terms of experience, and thereby become larger than consciousness. We want to become the owner of consciousness.

"By my efforts and my preferences, I shall attain awareness. I shall know consciousness and harness it for my bliss."

Ah.

As if we can rein it in. As if we have any leverage at all to make things to our liking.

When actually, It owns us.

Because we are in*It*.

We are *of* it. We *are* it.

Literally.

This*It* is us.

This color is us. This sound is us. This thought, this feeling- this sadness, fear, resistance, joy, bliss, calm…

Us, us, us.

It, It, It.

Nothing - not even suffering- can be left out without diminishing ourselves.

And diminishing is not possible.

Because It includes all.

Which means we include all.

And that

is as*IT*

as it gets.

"Nothing happens next. This is it."

~Zen saying

I'M OFFENDED!

May 5, 2020

My acquaintance is offended. How dare I post a laugh about OCD? That's not funny. Do I not know OCD is a serious problem afflicting so many? Do I have no concern for people's pain?

My acquaintance is offended. Do I not know that alcohol jokes are like rape jokes? Have I no sensitivity to all the misery alcohol has created, to people's past and current struggles?

My acquaintance is offended. How does The Mind-Tickler dare joke about COVID, when they just had a family friend die? How can the Tickler make light of their terrible loss?

My acquaintance is offended. How dare I post about an oversize body in a too-small bathing suit? Do I not know the awful lifetime pain of being overweight? Do I not realize the potential hurt of my words is no better than bullying?

My acquaintance is offended. 30 years they have been on the spiritual path seeking enlightenment, and now I stroll casually, laughingly, right off that path into wild, rough grass. The wrongness - it's infuriating. How dare ignorant me even look at this sacredness?

Ah the tender sensibilities of self. There's no end to its ability to create outrage out of nothing.

I mean, sure, who doesn't enjoy a good laugh? As long as it's not about our situation.

But when it's about the Me, the story of this particular life… well then, it's not funny. It's offensive.

Because it's personal. PERSON-al.

And personal is infuriating.

Truly, nothing is more sacred than the self and its story and its past and its feelings and its likes.

And its pain.

We have no problem giggling at the non-pain. But our particular suffering? That requires hushed tones, whimpers, tears.

That requires reverence. Don't even think of doing anything but worshipping at that alter.

Take my pain seriously! DO. NOT. MAKE. LIGHT. OF. MY. GOD.

Which is understandable, really. After all, we have all these years of defining the self by "memories" and the supposed past. "I am the one with the alcoholic dad, the one with the lifetime-laughed-at body, the one who never got enlightenment despite trying so hard."

All these years polishing and preserving and honoring this version of This is who I am.

Such an investment. A devotion.

And then along comes someone with their own, different treasured pain, who is less than reverential about our carefully preserved narrative.

Well.

It feels like they're laughing at the Me.

The actual Me, not just a story of me. The story feels like it's literally what we are.

So of course it's got to be protected.

Perhaps if other people willl just honor it, worship it with us, never take it lightly, never cross a line they don't even know is there…

We can continue thinking our long-held tale of who we are and what happened to us and why it matters, is indeed what we are.

While meanwhile of course, those same folks are busy honoring and protecting their own chronicles of who they are too.

So no one ever notices that all of us, every single individual, is non-stop hiding that that chronicle is not what we are.

Because let's face it. Nothing real is harmed by the letters F or A or T. Nothing real can prove a long-ago past still exists today, or even ever existed. (Oh lovely reader, notice if that one ticks you off, thereby proving the point.)

Nothing real depends on a collection of words and images, occurring to who-knows-what, to prove its existence.

Offense is an excellent diversion for not noticing the unreality of self, the unsolidity of story, the non-threat of non-existence.

Offense keeps the sense of self alive.

This is me and I'm offended.

This veil must not be breached. How dare we even notice it.

And yet, what might be left if it was possible to not identify with a fable? Without diversionary tactics?

I mean, it's not possible. We can only ever be a sense, a story. We can only depend on narrative such as, "And then this happened," to know who or what we are.

Still, without all the usual clenched maintenance and protection of pain…

Wow, what a tale. What possibilities for lightness, amusement, inclusion of every happening, every whimsy.

So much more fun than the wary, pinched, careful outrage

we've been so devoted to honoring.

Who knows? We might even notice

how lighthearted this wispy comedy has been

even in every furious offense,

All along.

JUDGE THIS!

May 12, 2020

The client is judging. In the middle of our time together, using their own personal session, to spend time discussing and analyzing… me.

They want me to know of their displeasure. With me.

I don't make eye contact, I am obviously fearful, I don't look happy, I am too invested and too quick to interrupt, I clearly have problems.

All of which I get.

After all, our sessions often veer into some form of, We are not what we think we are, territory.

And one of the fun things the mind does, when it begins to see its own nothingness and non-existence, is look around for something that it can point at it and say, "There! I have a problem with that!"

In this case, moi.

They want to make I-contact.

All while we're seeing together that there isn't one.

So cue the judgments. Those delightful opinions about others that seem to affirm our own rightness in the world. our own place in the world, our point, our location.

"Here I am. The one who knows things, the one who's right, the one who disapproves of you."

What a great way to reify the self, while appearing to be talking about someone else.

And then just to seal the deal, judgments come with feelings. Irritation, jealousy, smug superiority.

Sometimes there's shame too. I mean, everyone knows we're not supposed to judge; we're supposed to love, to never have unloving thoughts towards others. And here we are, judging. Shameful.

So we try not to. Sort of.

And of course, we fail.

Because not-judging can't be done.

Because the mind wants to be center stage at all times.

To do that, it has to judge what is not itself.

And also what is itself.

After all, it's not as if we let ourselves of the hook, is it? No, most often we're particularly cruel towards our own self.

While pretending we are a reliable and accurate evaluator.

Of existence.

We- the smaller- obsessed and compelled to evaluate and rate-

Existence, the larger.

Yeah that's not humorous at all.

"Ok now listen up, existence, you may blend all this into one seamless experience made of infinite colors, shapes, sounds and sensations. But I, I, am going to arbitrarily create and perceive a separate Me and a separate Them and thereby exert my power. Over you, existence. Bwahahahaha."

I mean, do we even hear ourselves?

Meanwhile, does existence, consciousness, the universe- whatever the name of choice- evaluate us?

There is zero indication this is so.

Since it would only be judging itself.

Since it is already everything.

Including all of us wacky humans, and our unavoidable judgments.

So it is already experiencing itself

with the absolute opposite of disapproval.

And I-contact is already

all there is.

"Are you going to wear your hair like THAT?"

~my mom

YOU THE DOER

May 19, 2020

Back in my Byron Katie days, for years I watched no TV, listened to no music, indulged in no social media (there wasn't really any yet.) Instead, whenever there was any available moment, I listened to recordings of Byron Katie.

Why? Because I desperately wanted to feel better, to fix myself and make me right, ideally forever. And inquiry and listening to recorded help from BK was something I could*do*.

I had to do something.

I did it a lot.

Fast forward to today, where some of my clients use the time between sessions to cruise YouTube for all the usual wise sages and a whole bunch of not-so-wise not-so-sages. They're seeking out every book, every eye gazer, every soft-voiced claimer of enlightened strategies for how to attain…

their own betterness. Their transcendence over self.

In sessions, we discover that they have no power over existence, that they may not be what they think they are. And then life and feelings and thoughts get to be "too much," and they look for something they can do about it.

You know I'm talking to you too, lovely reader.

You know you're asking Robert unending questions, falling asleep to Rupert or Poe or driving to Hedderman or Tolle or Watts. Perhaps you even go to

India or Bali or some retreat, as if the Do-Something being sought seek will respond better to bigger, grander actions, or as if what is wanted can't be found in your own postal code.

The reason for all this activity is supposed to be to feel better, to understand, to get it.

Though all this activity makes for a doer. Which, as any self-respecting seeker knows from all those books, can't be right.

Not to mention that getting better feelings, getting more understanding, comes, if it does at all, unreliably, unpredictably. Uncontrollably.

Inquiries make for better feelings, sometimes. Meditations, satsangs, recordings- only effective sometimes.

Clearly it's not your actions making things shift. Otherwise shift would happen every time.

You keep trying, though. Because as Pavlov discovered, intermittent, only-sometimes reward keeps a behavior in place indefinitely. The subject learns, "Maybe this time, my pushing the lever will bring the treat."

So here's all this doing and practicing seeming to work for you sometimes. The lever keeps you at it and at it, seeking the treat, indefinitely. For years.

Find the right magic and take control of what existence brings. Then you'll never have to come back to this messy, uncertain and inexplicable human existence again.

Oh mighty you. More the doer than consciousness is, more in-charge than existence. The sense of I firmly in place as you gaze...

in the wrong direction. Because doing can only perpetuate and cement the sense of self.

Here it is, right here, helping itself by listening to podcasts.

Even though one can't get to non-doing by getting some good doing in.

What a perfect smokescreen.

Perhaps this is why it is so very uncomfortable to not do something, to wait, to accept what comes, to be at the mercy of existence. It's bewildering, confusing, uneasy. So frustrating!

You don't like it.

That not-like solidifies the sense of you further.

Great.

So what now? Because let's face it- you're reading this looking for what you can do about it.

Ok, so here, paradoxically, comes something you can do. Never let it be said I never gave you anything.

I'm offering this not because your actions matter one whit. I'm offering it because a person has to do something. Because it's simply not possible to be alive, and do nothing.

So this is as good a thing to do as any other.

Ready?

Try exaggerated doing. Try understanding extra hard. Try feeling extra big.

Don't worry about doing it right; it doesn't matter how you do this (which is the whole point of today's Tickler).

And then, consider being experience. Try on the possibility that you are the feeling, you are the urge to do, you are understanding itself.

Rather than the one who feels, the one who understands, the one who does.

What happens to that sense of self?

Is there a sense of self?

Not that any of this is up to you. It's not.

And if none of this makes sense, it completely doesn't matter.

You're just playing,

because why not.

So there you go!

Busy

your self

with that.

"Are you going to wear your hair like THAT?"

~my mom

ARE YOU CERTAIN?

May 26, 2020

"It will do you no harm to find yourself ridiculous. Resign yourself to be the fool you are."

~T.S. Eliot

Years ago I said to my dad, "I'd like to start my own business." He said, "Well you can't, so that's that."

So I shut up and didn't give him the key info that I had already started the new business.

Because he was certain. That door was closed.

6 months later when I finally told him, he was hurt to have been left out. He did not at all remember our earlier conversation.

How does this story of my distant past relate to current-day friends? Y'know, the friends who are new fist-pounding evangelists for their own expertise on immune systems, politics, or whatever their government is or is not up to?

They think they know something. They are certain they know something.

Which is kind of weird.

Because so many of these folks are "spiritual" people who for decades have also been absolutely certain that there's only one mind, and we are all one, and it's all love, etc etc etc. Many have devoted their whole lives to being

open to "not knowing," and to not believing every thought that rolls through the mind.

And now here they are, feverishly following every What-If and Could-Be that the mind drums up, and hitting the block button on everyone who is of a different mind than they.

Certainty has moved on to a different subject of expertise.

Which I get. I mean, no one is immune to selfing.

After all, the self is all about knowing where it is, where it stands. The self requires a position, a side, a view-point.

Literally.

These words of location, of geography, say, "Here I am! Right here. This is me, the one on this political side."

In this way, the self is defined. We know who we are. We're the one who knows something about a virus, a vitamin, a government.

If we're going to have a truly open mind for all those YouTube videos and screaming Facebook posts, we're going to be left questioning who we are as a person.

Which perhaps is why anger rises up when we encounter disagreement. Constant defense must be maintained against any battering ram to the self story.

So naturally no one's mind ever gets changed by contradictory input. With all that certainty, there is no contradictory input.

Only self-affirming views get through. The mind eliminates any other possibilities.

So yes my dad was certain. And yes my friends know without a doubt that their actions can keep a virus from killing them if it wants to, or that they're being imprisoned by people who don't understand the concept of immunity.

This isn't likely to change any time soon. It's possible that those folks predicting that these times are the start of a new era of peace and love may be in for some disappointment.

Because so far we humans adore our self stories, and we continue to seek the false comfort of certainty to maintain them.

No matter how infuriated it makes us, we have to belong to a side. A person needs to be placed somewhere.

Which is why we may never get to notice that we don't know, have never known, and will never know, anything outside the filter of self story.

We don't know what we don't know.

We don't know.

What a relief.

So much more peaceful than having to defend, and fight so hard for, the maintenance of a made-up, incomplete, and inaccurate, point of view.

Ok so, is anyone right? Does anyone know the truth, something more than a filtered viewpoint?

Well, we will be completely certain that we do.

And still,

we will actually

never know.

"The attachment to beliefs is
The greatest shackle.
To be free is

To know that
One does not know."

~Wu Hsin

SPIRITUAL BLAH BLAH

June 9, 2020

"The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return."

~Lao Tzu

There's been a bunch of headshaking going on here at Mind-Tickler headquarters these last few months.

In part because, despite all the very intense human drama happening all over the world, a fair number of "spiritual" folks want to talk about the woo.

I mean, really want to talk about it. As in, non-stop talk about it.

Never mind virus, protests, fires, weather, wars, politics, conspiracies, and 8 billion different versions of daily life. Never mind pesky human experience.

All over social media, in podcasts, on youtube, are long-winded discussions about what is awakening, or if enlightenment actually is as expected, or if gurus should charge money to share their great wisdom. All over social media, designated sages asked unending questions, obliging with unending answers, about what they know about awareness, about realization of the self, about the "path," and of course the number one topic, the I.

So many words of someday-maybe transformation, someday-maybe levels of attainment.

To the exclusion of all else. It seems the woo is the only thing that matters.

Clearly the emotional earth-bound mess of the human has no value, no interest, no truth of its own.

Although, there are so many words about spirituality, and so much avoidance of the difficult, it can almost start to look like there might be fear of the human experience.

Fear of smallness, imperfectness, total lack of any control. Fear of riotous, unharmonious, feelings and thoughts.

Yeah let's just skip that and instead git to talking about transcendent harmony and how to be more empty.

Now maybe the Tickler is being dramatic. Or maybe not. Because how else to explain the perpetual jabbering on about nonduality right now?

We might see though, that this obsession with realization is business-as-usual busywork for the mind. And that the constant compulsion to discuss it might, in itself, actually prevent the great enlightenment people are so devoted to finding.

Surprise! All the yammering about the nondual is just another way to stay rooted in self.

While denying what we also are.

Which is. human. Mind-driven, feelings-whipped, unevolved and illusory. Experiencer of the ten thousand things.

Human is where life actually happens, where we actually experience.

And yet we're intent on doing away with so much of it.

Seekers have lost touch with the value of existence as it is, discounting and talking ceaselessly about transcending it.

The thing is, when does consciousness get to indulge in a good fury, a lusty terror, a juicy pain?

Here's this amazing action film full of color and pathos and drama and violence and tear gas and rubber bullets, and there the seekers are, in the theater, trying to be above the film, nose deep in I am.

When does awareness get to experience the charged-up parts of its own movie, without humans trying to edit out all the color and No-Self it away?

When do we get to be, without talking or thinking about, and without trying to be something else?

Not that consciousness minds any of this, of course; it includes all that too.

It's just that whether enlightenment is attained or not, this film can't be transcended. As long as we're alive, we're in it. We might know it's a movie, we might watch the movie. But we're still in the movie.

Because we are both the self illusion and the no-self.

No amount of spiritual blah blah will pretend that away.

So maybe once in a while it's possible to just live, un-analyzed, unfocused on the self's attainments. Being in this existence without all the talking and writing about, obsessing about what we are, compulsively trying to attain.

Who knows? We might find that ironically, paradoxically, the ability to experience that kind of silent and full-on presence with what is, without avoidance, could turn out to be the very enlightenment that's been sought.

Wouldn't that be something.

What a film.

What an experience.

There are

no words.

TRUE SELF

June 16, 2020

Over the weekend I took another painting workshop**, and towards the end, found myself getting defensive.

Believe me I was surprised as the next guy. I mean, what was I defending?

All I wanted was to make a nice painting. Come on existence, just one!

Nope. The brush had other ideas.

So Judy got feisty and protective of a painting that didn't exist.

And while it could appear that that glimpse of arguing-with-reality Judy was about unhappiness with the painting, those words "found myself" in the first sentence above might indicate otherwise.

As if that self-protective grumbler who showed up in class was me. A me that had been missing, and was happened upon at last.

Aha! There's my self. Found it!

There it was, hiding under the public presentation. There it was, the imperfect, flawed, bad, angry, stupid, loser, unlovable self.

Isn't it weird that what so many of us call the "real me" is actually a list of bad qualities?

As if under all of our carefully applied lipsticks, lives a pig.

Most of us spend lifetimes trying to corral and control that pig, keep it in the pen, hide it, fix it, clean it.

Every once in a while though, that thing pokes its head out, makes a run for it, and escapes, putting a lifetime of carefully-honed identity and public presentation at risk. And just for good measure, bringing muddy shame and guilt along for the jaunt.

Look at it- that self-thing is a mess.

Which may be why it seems totally necessary to reject it, and desperately want the unkempt self to disappear, or at least stay in the pen.

So reject it we do, greatly preferring the nice mask, the cover-up, the polite, pleasant, kind self.

Even though the falseness of the got-it-together person is obvious. Even though the effort of keeping that facade out front is palpable.

We're ok with the presentation of that unreal self, and the effort to keep it going. We're not ok with the imperfect flawed quirky mean identity that we think is the truer, more genuine self.

Which is why it's funny that we rarely come to consider that that grumpy, stupid, loser self is not us either.

That that's also false, and a mask too.

Because characteristics aren't selves. Qualities aren't selves. They're versions, stories, fables. They're engrossing as hell, as all good stories are, but still, fiction.

You realize what this means, right? It means neither the good-guy version of who we are, or the bad flawed messed-up version of who we are, is actually what we are.

And since most of us have clung so long to the idea that there's a true bad me hiding under the pretend good one,

simply considering the possibility that neither the good nor the bad characteristics of identity are what we are,

can be downright revolutionary.

Liberating, even.

Because if we're not any of that, what are we?

Who knows, free of all pinned-down identity, we might just be left as all of it. We might just be left with vast, expansive, inclusive. We might just discover we're every thrill, every frustration, every laugh and love and rage.

Wouldn't it be something to end up with a whole lot less "healing," a whole lot less project, a whole lot less fixing and improving and enlightening to keep the self busy.

Then the façade becomes beautiful, the lipstick lovely, the pig adorable.

And then we are every great painting, and every crappy painting, and that which got exactly the painting it wanted this weekend.

Regardless of some human's preference or evaluation.

Wow what a painter.

Holy pig.

"Ram Tzu knows this -
You are perfect.
Your every defect
is perfectly defined.
Your every blemish
is perfectly placed.
Your every absurd action
is perfectly timed.

Only God could make

Something this ridiculous
Work."

~Ram Tzu, Wayne Liquorman

BELIEVE THIS!

June 30, 2020

"I used to think the brain was the most important organ in the body,
until I realized what was telling me that."

~Emo Phillips

In preparation for writing today's Tickler, I girded my loins and read a ton of social media posts about what is really going on in the world.

The things I do for you. A shower would be nice right about now.

I learned that the video of George Floyd's death was actually a staged act, he's not really dead. I learned that Donald Trump has dementia, neurosyphilis, a stroke, pathological narcissism, and perfect health. I learned that COVID is a hoax, hospitals are empty, no one has died from it. Or millions more than we have been told have dies, but they all got the flu vaccine last year or they didn't get enough sunshine or they were already sick. I learned the elites are eating the internal organs of children with no anesthetic.

Yes every one of these authors absolutely believes the things they've written.

Key word in that sentence is believe.

Because even though any storyline can be backed up by some expert trotted out to prove that particular point of view, and even though there's what appears to be unquestionable science for any side…

belief is all anyone's got.

Because the mind makes stuff up. Right out of nothing, it manufactures nonsense.

And just like in any nightmare, where snakes and Batman fall in love,

in the dream, we believe what it tells us.

Again, key word is believe. Because the only difference between night thoughts and day thoughts is the thought, "This is real."

"Reality" requires belief.

Which is why it's not possible to not believe something.

We have to believe the evidence the mind gives; it is all we have. And everything is, by necessity, propaganda for a viewpoint.

This is not negotiable. Otherwise… well, there is no otherwise.

After all, we can't take in everything- it's too much. Information has to be narrowed down. So we filter- through our small-world conditioning, our "personal experience," our selective little blinders- to decrease vastness and funnel it through the sieve of thought into manageable smallness.

We don't notice the filtering.

We just notice that we need to know where we stand.

Otherwise, if we don't "take a stand" somewhere, we don't exist anywhere.

Which is bad. Not as bad as having different beliefs, but close.

Existence depends on belief.

So by golly we're going to fight for how we see things. We're going to fight for a point of view.

We're going to get violent in its defense, at the very least rolling our eyes, or hitting the block button on everyone whose filters give them a different set

of beliefs.

It's not enough to have faith in our own nonsensical mind ramblings. No, we insist others believe our beliefs too.

We are willing to kill, and even die, for them.

Which is weird when we think about it. I mean, apparently proving our existence via viewpoint is so important, that we are willing to rage and fight and even lose that very same existence.

For thought. For nothing.

Points of view are a frenzy of me-ness.

And what's actually true? Who is right?

We will never know. We are not built to know what's outside our biased filters.

There's no check for the nightmares of thought running amok, in the dream.

No one's beliefs can be trusted. Not mine, not some wise teacher's, not even science. It's all thought, it's all filtered.

It's all dependent on believing.

So the only non-kool-ade option is to open to the possibility that we're missing something. All we can do is can consider that, despite our absolute certainty we're right, and despite our absolute certainty that our proof does indeed prove something...

we still might not know.

Which can soften certainty a bit. Not completely, of course- a truly open mind is not possible.

But maybe enough.

Since we're not likely to go to war over a soft certainty.

And I say this knowing it will lose me friends and earn me the block button and/or the opt-out link.

I am quite sure of this.

I've done the research and

I know.

Anyone who thinks otherwise is

Delusional.

Believe me.

"You will always experience what you believe and nothing else. And this invalidates your experience."

~J. Krishnamurti

MOVIES R US

July 7, 2020

"It recognizes itself."

~Rupert Spira

"Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists."

~A Course in Miracles

My friend's husband is having an affair with a woman at work.

Unsurprisingly, my friend is distraught. She vacillates between trying to force herself to tolerate his behavior, and trying to force herself to leave. Her friends offer similarly conflicting advice - Leave him! Do everything he asks and just be a better wife!

But she won't be doing anything for a while. She is frozen in place.

Whatever spiritual understanding she may ordinarily have had, whatever meditation, inquiry, or hard-sought equanimity- that's all out the window.

Which is common for so many of us when faced with painful situations. Life circumstances have a way of generously helping us forget everything we know.

So perhaps my friend can be forgiven for not noticing that while she's slogging through her difficult days, she's been literally watching a mental movie.

The same movie that almost all of us mistake for daily life.

It's the movie showing us the already cooked dinner, while we're standing in front of the veggies in the grocery store. It's the film about our kids coming out of lockdown running unschooled through life like wild wolves, while they're happily playing video games as we wash the dishes. It's the conversations and arguments we have with people who aren't there, while standing in the shower.

Lying safely in bed, we see ourselves homeless and broke, or dying alone, or going crazy and being locked up. We picture the husband choosing her over us.

We "see" ourselves.

We picture life. We literally watch ourselves live.

Our movies also have a know-it-all, Morgan Freeman-like narrator, who helpfully intones things like, "You blew it. You shouldn't do that. You're doing this wrong. You're wasting your life."

And then for extra fun, we picture the husband smiling at stranger and Morgan says, "See? This means you are unattractive and unlovable."

Mental images come to mean something- something about us.

Because of course it's always about us. How else can we thoughtfully be self-defined and labeled in various miserable ways: Loser, unlovable, bitch, failure, bad person.

As if any identity, based on any imagined image, can be real. As if any sound contains meaning. As if meaning is ever anything more than a concept.

We pretty much never notice that we're watching a movie.

We certainly don't notice that if we're able to see this movie, we can't actually be in it too.

That can't be us in the movie.

After all, there's only one of us.

So if we're not visual representations, if we're not stand-ins on a screen, then we're… well, what?

Whatever it is, it's not sad, scared, unsafe. It's not opposed to movies about cheating husbands, foreclosed mortgages, viruses, politics, crying children.

I mean, it's safely in the theater, enjoying the movie experience.

Which is why it can be amazingly calming to see that we are not the scared screen character who might be losing money, husband, health.

Turns out, de-identifying with the delusion that what we are is a mental movie image, feels better.

Perhaps because that watching viewpoint is closer to the truth.

Though it may not be the whole picture.

Because sitting as a watcher in a theater creates a me, places us in a location, solidifies the observer, and separates us from the story on the screen.

Which feels off too. After all, where does the observer end and the movie begin? Where's the dividing line?

Maybe there isn't one.

Because maybe we're all of it.

Maybe we're all the film characters, and the narrator, and the watcher experiencing all that. Maybe we're also the screen, the projector, and the colors, shapes, and contractions on the screen.

So is it possible to lose a husband if we are him, too?

Now of course, when we're in the middle of misery, we're not likely to want to step outside the film just to contemplate, Maybe I'm not what I think I am. And of course we're always perfectly free to never stop watching the movie and thinking that it's the Me.

It's just that, in those rare moments when we see there's no divider between us the character, us the watcher, and us the movie itself,

Then we gain some space, some clarity, some truthier truth than a movie can ever provide.

And then we don't need film characters to follow a different script, or make the movie go in a different direction, just so we can integrate what we know with what we are.

Husbands can do what they do. Feelings can come and go.

We get to just BE.

As everything.

Which is mind-blowing.

And feels a lot better.

And makes us

a whole lot more

than we thought.

"You are the Buddha."

~Adyashanti

"This place is a dream. Only a sleeper considers it real. Then death comes like dawn, and you wake up laughing at what you thought was your grief."

~Rumi

LOOKING FOR LIGHTNING

July 14, 2020

"What is everywhere is neither without nor within, yet both."

~Wu Hsin

"I've come to the realization that the only way to find it is to be it."

~Alan Watts

"C'mon enlightenment. Hit me!"

My friend was out jogging and had the thought, "This would be a good time for enlightenment to come, the lightning bolt, the permanent expansive moment."

No? OK how ‘bout now?

Sadly, there was nothing but crickets from the enlightenment gods.

Which naturally left my friend disappointed, since he's pretty certain there's a better state out there and that life would be better if only he could at it. He's also certain he doesn't have what he's seeking.

He's not alone in that thought, of course. Countless others around the world share those exact same certainties.

After all, there's been no lightning-bolt, no falling off the bed, no sidewalk opening up, no calm all the time. There's an elusive something which hasn't been accessed- a peaceful feeling-state, a spaciousness.

When that is accessed at will, full time, they'll know they've arrived.

Which is perhaps why, spending large portions of life hoping to attain access, most seeking folks turn... inward.

Not outward, mind you. Which is, y'know, where lightning lives.

No, inward, in, to themselves. Meditating on the breath of the body, sitting with the feelings of the body, inquiring into the innermost thoughts that come to the body in the chair.

Looking inside that small, porous container.

For the infinite.

As if everything worth having is contained in that little personal box. As if vastness can be locked in the body somewhere, in some closet, some storage center.

Looking inside to transcend the inside. Looking for the not-self, within the self.

One can see this might not be a great strategy.

So perhaps, if someone wanted to experience bigness, they could try something different, and look outside rather than in.

They might look to what isn't contained.

Because when referring only to the innerness of body, the mind takes ownership, and gets trapped in the thicket of all-encompassing self.

And it becomes too easy to not notice that, if anything is within, it would be that self they are looking to.

The self is contained within the vast, included in it, part of it,

Rather than the other way around.

Which, to be clear, is not to say that infinity isn't also inside every individual box as well as outside.

Because, after all, infinity. It's everywhere. It includes everything.

Even the seeker.

It's just that focusing on the inside of small might cause a person to miss the much vaster container which is supposedly being sought.

Because the mind looking in can't see outside its own self.

And even though right about here, the mind says, "But I don't know this! I need to know it, it's not real till I know..."

still, the infinite includes that too.

Which means it's not particularly relevant what the box thinks, or feels, or knows. It's not necessary to put the mind aside, or get beyond it, or get it to shut up.

It's not necessary to transcend anything.

Because all of it is already within the without.

This leaves seekers with a whole lot less work to do, a whole lot less not-enoughness, a whole lot less lack of enlightenment.

After all, how much more infinite than infinity can any one person be? How much more vast? How much more spacious? How much more complete than complete?

How much more inside the outside, contained by the uncontained,

can any

one

BE?

Now that's big.

"I searched for God and found only myself. I searched for myself and found only God."

~Rumi

"There's absolutely nothing you have to do. You are already free."

~Robert Adams

THE REAL THINK

July 21, 2020

"You can't stop your mind from thinking because you don't start it thinking."

~Adyashanti

"The notion that the one who thinks is completely separate from the reality that he thinks about is of course firmly embedded."

~David Bohm

Thoughts. We're used to them, aren't we?

In fact we're so accustomed that we have come to call them, "mine".

As in, these belong to me. These are my thoughts.

We think we own these babies.

Which is kind of funny if we think about it. (little joke. Har har)

After all, it's not like, "I'm not good enough," or "There's something wrong with me," or "I need something different..."

hasn't appeared identically, word for word, in a zillion other heads, a zillion other times, over centuries.

It's not like, despite our ownership, thoughts don't come when they want, stay as long as they please, and repeat as much as they like.

I mean, we often hate them, spend fortunes to get rid of them, and still they say and do what they want.

It seems we are not in control of our property.

Yet we persist in holding on tight to this "mine" idea anyway, because, for something to be owned, there has to be an owner.

Enter the person. Enter the self. Hello solid, real thing.

Now there's a me doing the thinking, a me with characteristics such as broken, bad, failure, fool. A separate me, an alone me, a me who is the only one who thinks these thoughts.

Now there is a unique, individual, independent-of-thought me who carries one-of-a-kind pain and special not-enoughness.

Whew. That's a lot of me-ing.

Especially considering how unprovable it is that any bit of this is "one-of-a-kind."

So what might happen if we were somehow able to notice the repetitive nature of the thinking that has come to us all these years?

What if we actually were to notice it has told us the same not-nice things, with the same not-nice words, over and over and over, since forever?

Like a scripted song and dance routine. Repeating, repeating, repeating. On everlasting replay.

"I am not enough, I'm at fault, I'm broken, weak, unlovable." Rewind. "I am not enough, I'm at fault, I'm broken, weak, unlovable."

For decades.

The script rarely varies.

Because, as it turns out, thought is lazy as hell.

Dialing in its lines, getting away with the very least necessary…

to create the appearance of sentience. To create the appearance of knowing, perceiving, understanding. To create the appearance of an individual.

To create the appearance of reality.

Not actual reality of course. Thought doesn't have that power. Just the appearance of reality. Just thoughts about reality.

Thinking creates only mirages.

Which means we have no idea what's real. We have no idea what's true.

We have no idea who, what, or even if, we are.

Not that any of this matters.

I mean, it's not like thinking which has existed for thousands of years is suddenly going to stop, or leave us alone, or change its script, if only we meditate or get therapy or inquire or become enlightened enough.

No, it's going to keep saying its lines.

The way it always has.

Because that's what it does.

It's just that there can be a fair amount of relief, of peace, of quiet, though, in not taking the script personally.

In no longer assuming that a bunch of miscellaneous blah blah blah, stuck on repeat for millennia, has anything to do with us.

In not assuming any causal relationship between thinking and "reality."

Then the sense of individual self starts to feel a little less solid, a little more wispy, a little less certain.

Which simply feels better.

Since being an individual is hard work, and often, usually, painful.

Luckily suffering, despite what thought says, is not a requirement.

So we might consider divesting of ownership.

Letting thought blather its scripted lines, ad infinitum.

Nothing cares.

It's nothing

To do with us.

Now that's off script, right there.

"Listen: this world is the lunatic's sphere,
Don't always agree it's real.
Even with my feet upon it
And the postman knowing my door,
My address is somewhere else."

~Hafiz

"You have worn this virtual reality headset all your life. What happens if you take it off?"

~Donald Hoffman

SHARE ALIKE

July 28, 2020

"No one has ever learned from the mistakes of others."

~Ram Tzu

"Nirvana is right where you are, provided that you don't object to it."

~Alan Watts

When I was little it seemed necessary to give others what they wanted from me. You want me to be good? Well, I don't know how, and I'm not at all sure I am good, but ok. You want me to be nice? To give you my love? To be eager to do homework and live for the future, making grades that will someday pay off in money and the good life?

Trying, trying, trying.

Usually also failing failing failing.

Now I'm grown up (seemingly) and people still look expectantly to me to give them something. Not so much good behavior anymore, thankfully. But they still want me to be nice. And they still want me to love them.

On top of all that now, they also want my point of view. They want whatever understanding they imagine I have, they want inclusion in my world. They want me to give them my supposed magic.

Kind of like bank robbers - "This is a stick up! Hand over the enlightenment!"

And like in my childhood, again, I would if I could. If I had it. If it could be given.

Though now I'm clear that this is a losing proposition.

Not least because humans are all about the gimme. Humans want to get. And not just a little; we want to get a whole lot. We want more, not less. We want lots of something, none of nothing. We want extra, we want plenty, we want forever, we want permanent.

There's never enough of any of that. So there's never going to be enough getting.

Even though folks are prepared to work hard for it. Sharing apparent love and approval in order to get others to give it back. Sitting in meditation to get more transcendence. Sitting with feelings to get more peace and self acceptance. Asking questions of teachers, reading self-help books, listening to podcasts ad infinitum, to get "awake."

Studiously, effortfully, ignoring what's here, to get something that isn't.

Which doesn't seem to be all that productive. Y'know, since it doesn't actually give anyone what is being sought.

Because it's not possible to feel one's own love by grabbing a hold of someone else's. It's not possible to get present by ignoring the present. One can't awaken now by trying to attain an exalted state that will (hopefully) come at some future time. It's not possible to get enough right now, by focusing on the lack of the now.

Seeking anything is a rejection of the present, a rejection of what is here.

Not to mention a reification of the identity of self, as the one who wants, the one who doesn't have, the one who can make things happen, if only they do all the right efforts on the right path.

Which may be th do-posit elf what is being sought.

Turns out all that trying, all that seeking, gets in the way, and actually prevents the hotly desired getting.

So I would share if I could, assuming I had anything that's of any use to anyone else. But it won't help.

It can't be given, anyway.

Love and understanding have to arise, on their own, when and if they please, individually. They can't be manipulated into showing up due to some human's considerable efforts.

Humans can't hitch a ride on someone else's experience in order to get what they think they want.

Which is why my best offer, the only thing I might have to share, is a wish for folks to stop looking to anyone else to find what is…

already ours.

If there is a way, it is to find our own way.

And if the mind kicks in and screams, "But I don't know how?"

Perfect. Thinking we need to know how is what turns us to others to teach us in the first place.

There is no someone else's how. There is no someone else's right way. There is no someone else's answer.

We got this.

So maybe we can throw out all the dogma we've grabbed from others, and throw out all the certainty that they have anything we need.

Maybe we can ask, and wait, and notice our own answers, our own understanding, our own love.

Which are there already.

On their own.

We might even have noticed, if we hadn't been discounting our experience by thinking someone else's is better or righter.

Existence doesn't have any need for clones.

We each have our own teeny bit of the great experiential pie.

Mine is already taken. Everyone else's is too.

Everyone gets their own slice.

And it is delicious.

And enough.

If only we'd notice

What's in our own hands

Already.

"I have already settled it for myself so flattery and criticism go down the same drain and I am quite free."

~Georgia O'Keeffe

"I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.

One world is aware, and by the far the largest to me, and that is myself."

~Walt Whitman

BORRRING

August 4, 2020

"When we imagine that we have found it, we don't like it."

~Alan Watts

"Only the ego makes its own demise seem dramatic."

~Adyashanti

Lately several friends have been experiencing something similar, though their situations all look different.

One is finding their long-time marriage tedious-- the multi-year spouse not exciting, the sex dull, all surprises long gone. Another questions if they're living their best life, in the right job, choosing the right hobbies, charity work, location, family. Another laments the loss of the bliss they felt for a few weeks. A few others find their long-time anxiety and depression have finally lifted, and now…

ZZzzzzzzz.

They're borrrred.

Ugghhh, how we hate boredom. After all, this can't be what life is supposed to be- this tedious one foot in front of the other, this monotonous same same day after day.

Life is supposed to be stimulating, fulfilling, happy. Where's the fun, the excitement?

There's obviously something wrong.

Because we all know that boredom is bad. We all know that it's wasteful of the life we're given, a constant slap in the face that we're living wrong.

Boredom is just so dang…. empty.

No one really likes that. Humans like fill-'er-up, extra, more. Big, intense, grand.

Empty is, by definition, nothing. And we can't fill up on that.

So we need to get busy trying to make things right.

Boredom's gotta go.

We look for ways to be more satisfied with life- get the new job, the new partner, a new city, new sexual quirk. Study up and get the bliss, joy, enlightenment at last.

Or maybe we replace the usual old project of getting rid of anxiety or depression with the new project of figuring out how to not be bored.

Whatever, as long as we can replace the humdrum with a more peak experience.

And if we can't do that with happy fun times for whatever reason, then we'll do it with failure, guilt, and shame.

Which is what comes when we know we're wasting our one wild and precious life. *(Damn you, Mary Oliver. ***see below)*

Either way, whether we're filled with intense bliss or intense pain and suffering…

It's not boring.

With intensity and big feeligns, emptiness gets filled.

And that's what we've been wanting all along, right?

Um,… yay?

The thing is, it's the human sense of self that wants more of everything *(including itself)*. It's the human sense of self that desires thrills. It's the human sense of self that evaluates experience...

and then also finds it lacking.

Because really, what other creature, large or small, feels that it's not enough just to be alive? What other creature feels an obligation to "make the most" of its time here?

So unsatisfying, this self business. So full of discontent.

Which is why, maybe we've had this boredom thing all wrong.

Maybe, like any cat or mosquito or armadillo, we're already living our best life, already making the most of life, already being all we can be.

It could be that it's not possible to waste this one wild and precious life.

No matter what we're "doing" with it. Even if we're just sitting on the couch staring at the ceiling.

Not to say that sitting around is preferable to bungee jumping, or vice versa.

It's just that there may simply be no need to constantly try to juice life up into something different or better.

There may be no need to constantly aim for peak bigness, no need for self-improvement projects, no need for the demandy-human game of, "I want more different better gimme."

Because without all the certainty that there's some better high experience out there, we might be shocked to find quiet contentment in what's already

here- in the "boredom," in the ordinary, the not-special, the not-thrilling. The husband as he is, the job, the homework, the house chores.

We might be shocked to discover the enoughness of this life, as it is, when we're not stewing over whether it's what we want.

When we're not placing our order for something else, we might discover a whole bunch of not-lack in the empty.

Which might be a rather different way of experiencing the exact same life we've already got.

I mean, wouldn't it be something if the quiet, not-special, moment by moment, unevaluated beingness we've been trying to avoid, is actually what we've wanted all along? What we've wanted bliss and happiness and excitement to get us all this time?

Here it is.

That's pretty exciting.

Definitely not boring.

So is this all there is?

Yes.

Is this all there is?

Yes.

Is this all there is?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

"Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?"

~Mary Oliver

SELF?

August 11, 2020

"Whatever you do to be free from the self also is a self-centered activity."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"It is not necessary to identify oneself as Conscious Presence. Who is the one that would do that? That one, You, the only one that truly is, is already Conscious Presence. There is no other one."

~Rupert Spira

I asked for it. Right there on Facebook I asked what you wanted The Mind-Tickler to write about this week.

And predictably, the majority of requests were for a reliable topic that already has 5 Mind-Ticklers specifically about it, as well as a bunch more that are peripherally about the same.

What topic is that, you ask?

Why, the self, of course.

As in, *is* there one?

You want to talk about what you are, what you aren't, your feelings, your thoughts, your mind and whether you're in charge of existence via free will. You want to talk about how others see you and what they think of you and how what they do reflects on you. You want to talk about how you can get enlightenment so you can make sure to get everything that self is entitled to.

Self self self. You you you. Center of all things.

Which is funny because, if I ask you to show me this centered thing, there's nothing to point at.

It's not a body- elbows, nostrils, heart muscle. It's not a brain. It's not in the body or the brain. Yes everyone likes to pretend it is, but look inside there and there's nothing a surgeon can scoop out. You point to the head but there's no self in there. There's theories about "energy," and lights or colors on a medical test.

Those aren't a self.

Still somehow it is clear there is a you.

Because you can see it. You can feel it.

In the body.

There's a sense. A sense of something there.

In the body.

I sense, therefore I am.

The body is the center around which it all revolves.

Here it is. Here I am.

You're looking to the body for a sense of the self, in order to prove there is a self.

Which is circular, and perpetuates the obsession that body is what you are.

Conveniently, turning to the body to answer questions about self–no-self is actually an attempt to prove you're something, rather than nothing.

Because self doesn't want to go poof and vanish. It wants to continue as is.

Whatever that is.

Which is fine.

But just for fun, what if you asked a different question?

What if the self is not affiliated with the body, at all?

Well that's weird.

If the self isn't located in a body, maybe not even associated with body in any way,

then where exactly is it? Does it feel, does it think, does it suffer? Does it lack for enlightenment?

You might be surprised to discover that simply considering that body is not the self, suddenly makes what that body feels and senses and attains, a whole lot less important.

Because it suddenly has nothing to do with you.

Turns out, simply playing with letting go of all that focus on what the body experiences for even half a minute, makes the old familiar sense of self...

Decentralize. Un-center. Diffuse. Un-locate.

Which is not what usually happens when you're looking for the answer in a body.

And then... this may be where fear shows up.

In the body.

Fear, effectively bringing attention back to the center of all things.

Hello body, hello self-which-knows-it's-there-by-feels.

"But what happens to meeee?" The inquiring self frets.

Nothing happens to it, because there isn't one.

This has always been the case. Whether it's been seen or understood, or not.

Nothing changes. It is what it is already. Whether that sense of self has been convincing or not.

Which is why there's no need to fear you're going to disappear the instant you somehow get this weird no-self business.

No one stops being. The sense of self carries on.

I mean, people can still see Adya and Rupert and Tony Parsons. There they are- body still there, personality still happening, each individual still carrying on with their lives.

They're not gone.

So there's no need to stop the fear- it changes nothing.

'Course, there's no need to worship it either.

And there's no need to try to stop feeling, no need to stop thinking you're in the body, no need to try to stop being engaged with this little dream.

There's no need whatsoever to get that the self isn't in there.

Because for you just like for every enlightened master from Buddha to Ramana on down, existence continues to experience via the body regardless.

So yes, self continues to pretend it and the body is what you are.

Even when you see otherwise.

That's how this game is played.

Knowing it's a game may perhaps make it easier to play.

Or not.

There may not be anything left to give a darn by that point.

And yet you'll get up, make the dinner, hug the kids, do the job, play the music.

Because it's nothing.

And because experience

goes on

through you

and also

without you.

How fun is that?

"This preoccupation with
Your personal drama is
The cloud that masks
The sun."

~Wu Hsin

"Peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life."

~Derek Walcott

GOT IT?

August 18, 2020

"To understand it, you must not face it but be it."

~Alan Watts

"Explanations
Do not provide
That which is sought."

~Wu Hsin

It comes up all the time, not just in answer to last week's query asking what people wanted the Mind-Tickler to cover. It comes up in sessions where hurting people are jusssttt about to touch … something new for them…

when boom!- thought snaps in and conversation diverts.

Diverts in a very particular way, to a very particular topic. Diverts to the urgently important….

"*Why?* Why does this happen?"

And suddenly explanations spew forth in a torrent. "This is because blah blah, it was caused by blah blah and that's why blah blah."

Something new has dared to show up for a moment. It brought confusion with it.

And as we all know, confusion is bad.

So quick, wipe it out ASAP with explanations of causation.

That's better. We understand now.

Oh we adore pretending we understand things. Anything. Everything. All of our past, and all possible futures. All about the mind, and feelings, and consciousness, and awareness, and enlightenment.

In fact often it appears the only thing worth having in this existence, is*knowing*. Since not-knowing clearly will not do.

"Inexplicable" is not welcome.

After all, how can we realize, if we don't realize what's happening?

Though somehow we don't notice that the explanations actually get us nothing.

I mean, once we supposedly know that xyz happens now because mom looked at us cross-eyed back then, then what? Do we simply avoid cross-eyes for the rest of our life, since we know all about that now? Will that make life better?

Besides, explanations are useless for exploring anything new. *Why,* along with its sister, *I already know this,* brings nothing except more of the same ol'.

Which is stuckness at its finest. Not to mention boxed in, uncomfortable, protective, and defensive of the status quo.

That's not what we want.

So maybe understanding is not all it's cracked up to be. Maybe it's comforting in the moment, while actually creating discomfort for all other

moments.

And the thing is, what are we depending on to do the job of comprehending, anyway? What needs two and two put together? What is satisfied by answers, calmed by dots connected?

What does the getting?

Understanding involves the mind. Comprehension requires thought. One can't "realize" in any way but intellectually.

That's book learning, not lived learning. That's parroting, not experiencing.

The search for *why* solidifies the sense of self, the sense of me, the one who's got it, the one who takes it in, the one who grasps the concepts in its hot, important little hands.

We are the holders of all knowing. As if we're holding a goldfinch, caging it, chaining it to its little post...

Yay, it's ours. We got it.

Unsurprisingly, we may start to feel separate from what's held, separate from what's known, separate from experience.

Which never feels good.

Perhaps because it isn't accurate.

But oh well, at least the mighty mind *understands*.

Meanwhile, wouldn't it be interesting, wouldn't it be different, wouldn't it be unfamiliar and *unknown*, to see what might happen, see what would be left,

if somehow we were able to experience without trying to get something?

Wouldn't it be fascinating to see what would be left if we could somehow not try to grab ahold of understanding?

We might be surprised to find that all that's left is living. Being. One foot in front of the other. Wood chopped, water carried.

Presence.

Not bothering to comprehend what happens, simply being it instead.

Because as it turns out, the present grasps nothing. It's not holding on to whys, not waiting to get some realizing.

Hello enough-as-it-is.

Hello this-is-it.

Hello, what we've supposedly been seeking all this time.

Turns out understanding is not only unnecessary…

It's in the way.

And settling into the possibility that experience might happen for absolutely no reason whatsoever, then at any point, without explanation,

Something unexpected, something uncontrolled, might fly in or out.

Something surprising, unowned, uncaged, unlimited, and free to roam.

Whatever wants understanding

may just unshackle, and fly the coop.

And there could be nothing left

to care

why.

HORRIBLE BEAUTY

August 25, 2020

"Life is suffering."

~Buddha

"There will always be suffering. But we must not suffer over the suffering."

~Alan Watts

Seen the news lately?

Around the world, unrest, unease, political outrage. Wars, disagreements, hatred. Fire, hurricanes, rising oceans. Animals mistreated, poisoned food, children sobbing, folks dying.

Hoo boy.

If we're paying attention, it can make any of us crazy with fury, fear, sadness.

Where's the joy we've been promised? Where's the kindness, the love? Isn't there supposed to be peace on earth? When does the lion finally lay down with the lamb?

There's a whole lot of suffering happening on this planet.

And as we all know, suffering is wrong, bad, and not how things should be.

This is not debatable.

How weird that humans are so very sure of this.

I mean, hardship and misfortune have been on this planet since forever.

It may feel like it's new or more intense in our times.

It's not, though.

For millions of years, existence has provided a cornucopia of turmoil, tears, change, and upheaval, as well as peace and contentment, for our experiential enjoyment.

And for perhaps almost as long, humans have held a stop-it hand up to say, "No. Take most of this enormous variety away. Joy and love only."

As if we know better than existence how things should be. As if our likes and dislikes- only- should determine what happens. As if human ideas of should, shouldn't, right, or wrong are the only possibilities.

The only proof of any of that being just more of our own opinions.

So maybe it's time to look at things differently for a moment or two.

Not because we have to.

But because for humans to insist that suffering shouldn't happen in this world, when existence has been clear all along that this is how things are and this is what it wants, seems… well, let's call it "immature."

So, what if it was possible to see from a different perspective? What if we could consider a non-human, more stepped-back point of view- like Mars maybe, or Saturn, some big distance we might try on from our usual filters, conditioning and certainties-

And then look back at earth.

Oh.

There's nothing wrong here.

Happenings happening. No good or bad. No This-must-change. No This-feeling-is-wrong.

"Wrong" is a meaningless concept to Mars.

Earthling humans made "wrong" up.

And then, if we were willing, just for an instant, to dare to drop even the idea of the self that these things are happening to…

And tried on the possibility instead that we are the happenings themselves…

that we literally *ARE* each feeling, each color, each thought…

Well, where does suffering go, where does wrongness go, where does misery go,

if we *ARE* it?

Do we still call it "suffering" then?

Pain might suddenly be a whole different experience. Still there, perhaps, just very different.

Maybe even sweet. Maybe even loving, maybe even filled with the true nature we are convinced is our birthright.

Right there in "pain."

Already. Without seeking.

Now, I realize that may seem like a giant imaginative stretch, and of course I'm not asking anyone to believe that this could possibly be so.

And I'm certainly not saying this is easy.

After all, we are completely used to thinking we always know what's right, that children crying is wrong, that crazy politician XYZ must go, that torture and misery is unacceptable.

Habitual ways of thinking are stubborn and truly mesmerizing.

Still, if we *ARE* every feeling and every thought,

we might not be in such a hurry to disappear them.

Which doesn't at all mean we shouldn't keep fighting political fights or putting out fires or helping animals or trying to right what we perceive as terrible wrongs here.

It's just that we might be more effective, more clear, more peaceful in our attempts to change the happenings on planet earth,

If we're not rage-filled and delusional with self-importance.

Because expecting existence to adjust to our preferences,

instead of the other way around,

seems fairly nuts.

And makes humans feel more significant and more solid than we may be.

Which also feels very wrong, and adds to the sense of suffering.

Thus becoming yet another wrong to right.

As if there aren't enough of those.

When all along,

We just may *BE*

every bit

of horrible beauty

and every bit

of experience

Already.

Making the idea of "change" and "wrong" and "suffering"

very odd concepts indeed.

SELF PROTECTION

September 1, 2020

"The bloke at the mic would say, 'Err, let's get out of Vietnam,' and a lady in a tweed skirt and cardigan would scream back, 'What are you going to do when the communists rape your sister on the front lawn?' We seemed incapable of thinking up good lines."

~John Tarrant

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

~H. L. Mencken

It used to be so much easier to love my friends and family before their political opinions were stabbing fingers in my face 24/7.

People I've known for years, hugged, danced with, toasted over Thanksgiving, people I know to be good folks, kind people of integrity…

Now divided into "sides," into closed camps- with scorn and righteous certainty as requirements for entry, along with some version of the password, "I agree with you!"

You'd think it would take a lot to foment divisiveness among loved ones, considering both teams say the same exact things about the other, both call

the other identical names, both blame the other for starting and perpetuating trouble.

But no. No one seems to have any problem screaming at the mirror.

And oh my gosh, the rage. Percolating even through should-be-harmless situations, like what color a hat is.

Identical, regardless-of-point-of-view rage.

It's a wonder people can breathe.

And yet not only can folks breathe while spitting fire, they seek out the fire, turning every conversation and post into an opportunity to position their worldview and stoke further fury.

It almost seems like a responsibility to convert the other team to our side.

In fact, we may even think rage is necessary to effect change, that no action will be taken if we're not out of our head with frenzy.

Anger seems necessary.

And we like it. We like the outrage. We look for it, feed on it, join groups to get more of it.

Furious intensity is the mind's idea of a good time. It doesn't want us calm.

Because indignation lets us know our position, our stance, our side.

Which, interestingly, are all words indicating geography. As in, "Here I am. Here's me taking a stand on this battle ground."

Guess it's called "identity politics" for a reason.

We identify as "me" through opinion.

As well as by association with a side. Because selves without agreeing-other selves are "vulnerable."

Although it's unclear, vulnerable to what, as in, what is protected and made stronger by screaming and side-taking and agreement?

We defend our position. With keyboard, flags, yelling and pepper spray,

we make our presence known.

That old reliable, years-nurtured sense of self- created, guarded, defended and maintained via viewpoint.

Now *that*- that sense of who we are- that's something worth fighting for. *That's* something to defend with everything we've got.

Funny though *(you laughing yet?)*, because fury doesn't actually protect anything. Screaming and opinion can't protect anything real.

Which means it's not really the sense of self that is in danger of exposure by disagreement.

In fact we're *all for*that being seen. We want that seen.

That's why we're so loud about it.

No, what is successfully hidden by rage and point of view, is the lack of self. The quiet, the empty, not-thereness.

That wispy not-there no-self.

That's what is "vulnerable."

Get quiet for a moment, stop defending and screaming our opinions for half a second,

and we're truly afraid we'll disappear.

Turns out we'd much rather yell and fight than see that we're not what we think we are.

Which might sound like extreme spiritual blah-blah, till we notice we'll go to any length including death, not to see this.

Agreement-seeking rage is an obscuring distraction, a basic way the self presents, a core strategy of mind.

Points of view and aligning with tribes pretend to establish our existence.

We cannot allow them to let up.

Which is why fury at disagreement has been around for thousands of years, and is not going to stop being around anytime soon.

So trying to calm down, trying to have a reasonable conversation (with no yelling or name calling), trying to let others have their views without being triggered, is verrrry difficult. Usually it comes with tremendous effort and gritted teeth.

Eventually we use words like, "I can't take it anymore," and resort to the block button to cut out people we used to love and enjoy.

We have to defend the sense of self from those barbarians. It's only right.

Now to be clear, I'm not saying this shouldn't happen this way. I'm not saying we should be "spiritual" and focus on positivity or enlightenment or any of that other bypassing nonsense. I'm also not saying anyone should try to exist without a point of view, maybe even a strong point of view. *(good thing, since being viewpoint-less is not possible.)*

And I'm certainly not dismissing the sense of importance of opinion in these times.

It's just that, if we can see the purpose served by our points of view, we might be able to do without quite so much self protection.

Only because the ferocious defense of illusion makes us crazy. Hate-filled. Mean.

Delusion makes us less effective, less right, and less able to step outside the usual boxes in order to think straight and find solutions.

Clarity enables us to stand a chance.

And right now, goodness knows we can all use a stance and a chance.

Because in the end, hugging friends and loved ones

rather than cutting them off with hatred,

is what all of us pretend-selves

really want anyway.

LOOK, IT'S YOU!

September 8, 2020

"If I have eye makeup on my chin and breakfast on my sweater, how would I know?"

~Byron Katie

"The reflection in the mirror is only made of mirror."

~Darryl Bailey

The lovely lady in the painting workshop is upset, close to tears, anxious.

She doesn't understand what her painting means about herself.

"This isn't my usual kind of painting," she says tearfully, "so I don't who I am."

You might think it's just a personal quirk of this one person, that simply painting something unfamiliar could bring about…

existential angst.

But actually it's not unusual at all. And not just in painting.

I mean, let any one of us get even a hint of not recognizing ourselves- in a mirror maybe, or doing something "out of character," and at best, there's

surprise and some discomfort.

And more typically, it's distressing.

After all, it seems necessary, required, this "know who I am" business.

Which is perhaps kind of odd.

First, because look at what we're expecting to tell us this important news-

A painting, a mirror, a word, an unexpected reaction.

"This paint splotch here is me when I was a child. That light-streak there in the glass is my sadness. There I am."

Um, *pssst*... none of that has a clue. It just sits there- it doesn't know who we are.

And second, because really, why is it so dang urgent to know? What's so all-fired important, that tears and upset come if we don't know who we are?

I mean, whatever it is, we're that whether it's known or not, aren't we? A cat is a cat even if it's unaware it's a cat.

Knowing adds nothing.

Still, we can't take our eyes off ourselves on the zoom screen, the building window, the mirror.

Because we're constantly looking to be "witnessed."

We require repeated verification of ourselves, via a view of ourselves. To be sure we're here, we need to look at it.

Through the external, we know we exist.

Even though common sense shows that what looks back from that mirror, that painting, that zoom screen-

Of course that facsimile isn't us.

And whatever it is that is actually reflected- the meaning, the person, the self-

That's all "like-ness," all concepts, all ideas.

That's not us.

That can't be mirrored. There's nothing to reflect.

So luckily it might be a good thing that no painting or mirror is ever going to be us.

Luckily we might find we're so much better off not knowing who we are.

Because after the initial pout, tears, and fear, and after the disappointment at losing delusion…

freedom.

Because then there's nothing to define or measure up to. Then there's unlimited options, surprise, fun.

Whooo hooo.

I mean, look at us, not having to be consistent. Look at us, not crammed into 2-dimensional paper, storyline, glass. Look at us, not having a mirage to try to match.

Look at us, ineffable, large, undefined, unknown.

Wow. Talk about expansive.

Why would we settle for know-what-it-is smallness

rather than THAT?

When it's so much bigger than any concept or pretense will ever contain.

Of course we can still have fun trying to make an image out of it, though.

I mean, why not?

That's the art

and the joy

of existence.

Whatever it may happen to

look like.

"If we watch a cloud and it takes on the shape of a person, a house, or a mountain, it doesn't matter what it looks like, we always know it's a cloud."

~Darryl Bailey

"...But if a mirror ever makes
you sad
you should know
that it does
not know
you."

~Kabir

DYING

September 15, 2020

You're dying y'know.

Right now.

It's terminal.

Of course we've all been dying since the minute we were born.

There's always been a built-in expiration date. Nothing alive on this planet is built to last.

Talk about planned obsolescence.

Despite this, wacky humans insist we can keep death away for as long as possible, based on our "choices."

"By the power of this parsley sprig and this 5k run, I shall stave off death."

Gosh the power and arrogance of little ol' us.

As if any human action can keep away death if it's ready for us.

As if just by having a "life expectancy," we'll force existence to keep us around longer than it wants.

Y'know, just by expecting it.

And as if death is "premature" if it happens before our plans say would be acceptable. Like we're owed any particular amount of time.

Meanwhile, we all know people who made all the right choices and still died before their 45th birthday.

Existence said, "Now's the time," and boom, outta here. No matter how old, how much yoga, or what strategies were tried.

Nothing premature about it, as far as life is concerned.

Still humans persist in the belief that we cause life to stay or go.

Because y'know, self-importance.

Importance Of Self.

Death is the apparent ultimate end of the self story.

Which is why it's feared most desperately.

And why everyone tries tries tries very hard to keep the body alive.

We think it's what we are.

So the body must carry on or else we disappear.

The thing is, what if humans have had that wrong all this time?

I mean, what if what we are is *not* physical, not blood, skin, muscles or cells of a body?

That would be weird, wouldn't it?

Because what *are* we, then?

And *where?*

Since, without "body-as-me," there's no… place. No location.

No here, no there.

That would mean we're everywhere.

Which would mean, dead or alive, we're not going anywhere.

Y'know, being everywhere already and all.

Oh yeah. Weird.

I mean, wouldn't it be something if it turned out that, without the perpetuation of the self story,

And without the smallness of the body's limits...

That LIVING FOREVER thing that humans been so earnestly wanting for millennia…

the LIVING FOREVER thing that has caused us to make up immortal vampires and ghosts and highlanders, just so we can pretend we never die...

could be exactly what actually

already happens.

That would make body-death a non-event.

Since what we really are has never been alive to begin with.

With or without fangs.

There is amazing peace in surrendering to the truth of this.

Not to mention sudden whooo-hooo freedom from avoidance of potato chips and cigarettes, from spirulina and kombucha and sit ups,

and from the carefulness of entire lives dedicated trying to make the body survive.

Could it be there's nothing left to be afraid of?

Talk about unfamiliar.

A whole new way of experiencing life.

Uncontained.

Unbound.

Un-Selfed.

Un-alive, and un-dead.

The complete

and total opposite of

terminal.

"You can't lose what you are."

~John Troy

"Death has nothing to do with going away.
The sun sets
The moon sets
But they are not gone."

~Rumi

AWAKED UP

September 22, 2020

Mmm, sleep.

We want it. We need it. More, better, longer. Wannnnnt sleeeeep.

Everybody knows how important sleep is. Every body, every mom, every doctor, every scientist.

Like breath, it is absolutely required.

And yet…

Somehow,*unlike*breath, a whole lot of people don't meet the sleep "requirement."

Lots and lots are getting only a few hours a night, staring at the ceiling till dawn, waking in the middle of the night and staying there. For some folks, we're talking years, decades, lifetimes.

Insomnia is a common occurrence.

It's a problem.

I mean, of course.

So naturally, gotta-fix-it humans try to force 8 hours and take pills and meditate and avoid caffeine and blue light and stick to a bedtime schedule.

And still night after night, sleep gives zillions of people the raspberry.

And also still night after night, for most folks, life, and the body, carry on, regardless.

Which surely contradicts the standard narrative.

I mean, that's a pretty feeble and optional "necessity" considering how often it's not there.

In fact, often there aren't even consequences, other than "*don't like*" and "*but surely LATER will be awful…*"

And since reams have also been written about whether consciousness and/or awareness continue when we're in deep sleep, there's no need for The Mind-Tickler to regale you with that stuff now.

Although many of those what-is-consciousness-during-deep-sleep conversations may be just the ticket needed to actually help folks finally drop off to sleep.

But I digress.

The thing is, where does the sleep-is-obligatory religion leave all those many people who aren't able to force repose to bend to their will?

Up a creek with a "*See, there's something wrong with me,*" paddle?

Or, could it be slumber is not actually the requirement we've been led to believe?

Could it be sleeplessness is even a gift, not a curse? Particularly for those claiming a desire to "wake up"*(whatever that is?)*

After all, so many mystics over the centuries deliberately skipped sleep, on purpose, in order to transcend. And who knows how many modern-day struck-by-lightening gurus have been or are poor sleepers.

So perhaps we can think outside the, "MUST SLEEP!" box for just a moment.

Because without much shut-eye, we might start functioning from a whole different viewpoint than from the usually-preferred sharpness of self.

We might begin to enjoy the ego *not*being on its usual alert, well-rested, and spritely game.

We might come to recognize and enjoy the gone, the out of it, the not-here, me.

Rather than thinking it is a bad thing.

Because for all we know, the crappy, spaced-out feeling that comes with "not enough" sleep is perhaps even necessary to wake up in a different way.

That when the mind gets busy and occupied with how the body feels, access through a back door to something different can become possible.

Unobstructed by the well rested self, tiredness may allow a different state of consciousness to enter.

A form of transcendence.

As the mystics of yore knew.

Waking up may be easier if we don't go to sleep.

Now of course no one is saying, "You *mustn't* sleep."

By all means, if sleep can happen, yay! Who wouldn't love that?

But if insomnia comes along night after night anyway, regardless of preference…

Perhaps, rather than assume it means we are messed up and doomed,

we might enjoy it a little.

Because there are gifts in being awake literally, while seeking to be awake metaphorically.

And because being *out of it*

May just be where we've actually wanted to be

All along.

"Everyone sleeps, except lovers, who stay awake, telling stories to God."

~Rumi

TRUE BELIEVER!

October 6, 2020

"If something is true, you don't have to believe it. You only have to believe things that are not true."

~Tom Thompson

Today a Loves-Trump friend got curious and left Fox News to check out what another news network showed. She was horrified. How negative the not-Fox station was about Trump, how they featured only stories that made him look bad, how shockingly they were biased against him!

"All they do is lie about Trump! That is not news, that is opinion! You have to be ignorant not to see it. I can't believe there are so many stupid and gullible people out there! They believe all those obvious lies!" she wrote. *(All quotes and exclamation points free of charge.)*

All her Loves-Trump friends completely agreed. One recommended another station for more accurate Trump-supporting news.

Meanwhile, a Hates-Trump friend wanders on to Fox to see what stories they're telling, to see how they falsify and pretty up and downright hide any info unless it shows Trump in a wonderful light.

She also sputters with outrage, she also can't believe people actually believe all those lies, she also generously trots out the exclamation points.

"They misconstrue the story line to fit their narrative! Interjecting their personal opinion! It's so obviously lies! They believe it! How stupid are they? How can anyone still support this evil man?"

Huh. Loves-Trump folks say the exact same word-for-words as Hates-Trump folks.

Weird.

So who's right? Who tells the truth?

Friends, you can trust only me. And maybe you, if you agree with me. Duh.

OK, OK, to be more accurate, no one is right. Not me, not you, not the other guys. Not no one.

Yes, I'm sorry. I realize it's absolutely certain that what you believe is true, and that I am an ignorant idiot for writing such ridiculous nonsense.

I mean, it's called "Truth," for goodness' sake. There's a right answer. Truth is truth. Somebody's right.

Although, if anger shows up just from reading these questions, it could be worth wondering why.*Why* is it so ferociously necessary to know what's true or who's right? What is so fragile that it needs that righteously angry f-you snit if it doesn't get agreement?

Anyway, the thing is, the news on any "side" has to be selectively edited and reduced in some way, because there is simply no way the human mind can take in the vast amount of available info.

Data must be made bite-sized so that it can be squeezed into a tidy and manageable human

point of view.

That requires a sieve, a bias, a perspective. News presenters choose info that will pass through their audience's particular does-it-fit-here filter. Everything else is left out or adjusted to fit.

And of course it's not just the news. Every single living moment, humans are eliminating huge tons of data. It can't all be taken in, so all experience

must be constantly pushed through a slanted, biased, point-of-view screen. *(There's tons of science about this.)*

Which is why we have zero ability to know what's been left out. We have zero ability to know what we don't know.

Which is how one person can look at Donald Trump and see a successful, powerful, superior-gened hero who gets things done, and another sees the exact same guy as a broke, bloated, corrupt, lying narcissist who ruins everything he touches.

It's not possible to know what's true. About anything.

It's only possible to *believe*rather than know.

It's always just *beliefs*. That's all we have.

We call them facts but they're only facts to us and to our similarly-biased team, from within the selective filters. To others, those same "facts" are lies.

"Can you believe xyz happened?" "I don't believe that news station." "I can't believe others don't see it." "I believe that's true."

Beliefs are not facts. Beliefs are not truth.

Beliefs are faith *in the filter*. They're trust in the screened, selected experience.

And beliefs change.

Truth, not so much.

We have nothing without beliefs. Literally nothing.

We're not big fans of nothing. So humans are drawn like flies to beliefs..

Because it's person-al. Because opinions define us, tell us who and what we are. Because points of view give us verification of self.

So we cling to our perspectives with great urgency. We fight for them, hate others for them, defend, protect, and deify them.

In the name of rightness and "truth."

We call this "trusting our own mind." Of course we have to do that in order to live in this world.

But in actuality we can't ever really trust it. It's biased, slanted and completely blind. at all times.

Lucky for us, seeing that we truly don't know jack--s---about absolutely anything can create a tiny bit of space, a small opening, in the bricked-in wall of belief.

Which can bring an oddly unfamiliar calm. Spaciousness. Peace. Even some clarity.

Truth has a way of doing that.

Of course we always still have our many beliefs and opinions, we still take political action, still choose a side, still pretend to know things.

But knowing that we never ever actually do know "truth" is such a relief.

Which unexpectedly expands, rather than limits, the mind. Paradoxically giving access to something bigger, truer, and less pin-downable.

Which perhaps is something worth believing in.

Or not.

I don't know.

I mean, that's a story *I* can believe.

But hey, that would just

be me.

ABIDING

October 13, 2020

So, ok well, y'know… This is it.

We've heard that before, amiright?

This is it, and Now is all there is, and there's nowhere to get to, we already have what we're seeking, and yada yada yada?

Nothing new there. We know all this.

And yet… but still… but also….but but… however, except, although…

Surely there's more than this.

Because this kind of sucks. Or maybe not really sucks, but certainly it's not enough. There's still reactivity, and lack of expansion, and thoughts on a habitual loop that ensnare us regularly.

And enlightenment hasn't shown up yet. Or maybe it has, but it's left. Or maybe there are still higher levels to be attained, and we haven't arrived at the end.

Clearly there's a there to get to. Which is surely why all those teachers tell of it, and try to explain so we understand, and point to any of the many many methods for getting there.

Life is a journey; we're on a path. And paths have an end point, an arrival place.

Although this one is called the pathless path. So there's no real path. It isn't there, not even sort-of. It's pretend. Otherwise it wouldn't be called pathless.

But OK. Wherever it is, we want to get there, And we're not there, not done, not arrived.

So this is not it.

Although some of us are lucky enough to be one of the special ones who do get there.

It's done, we did it. Ta da!

Now the job is to stay there.

Abide there.

Stay in that place where awareness is in front at all times, no matter what life throws.

No slipping in and out of awareness! Arrive, get it, keep it, hold it, glue it, chain it, make it stay.

Forever.

It's not real unless it stays. "Just sometimes" is not enough. It has to abide or it's inadequate and not the real deal.

Without abiding, it's just another stop on the ol' path.

So seeking a life lived in a never-ending spiritual loop might be full of dissatisfaction, not-enoughness, and even failure.

Perhaps the opposite of what we're seeking by all that seeking.

So instead, The Mind-Tickler wonders... how many lovely readers have tried answering yes to the question, "Is this all there is?"

Just trying that on. Believed or not.

This crappy feeling, these difficult thoughts, this not-OK situation, this flawed life as it is, with all its messy angst…

Is this all there is? Yes.

And then waiting out the inevitable pout, the whimper, the, "But I don't like it. It's uncomfortable."

Staying with the yes.

Because it could be that humans have no idea how things should be, and that nothing, certainly not existence, has asked for our opinion or preferences.

It could even be that this life is already existence's idea of perfection. Exactly as it is.

In which case, we are (gasp) already abiding.

Already abiding in perfection. Already abiding in enoughness. Already abiding in all-included, nothing-left-out.

Including in-and-out awareness of awareness.

So no path-to-nowhere is necessary. There is no "leads to" when there is no "to."

That's as IT, as abiding, as it gets.

Omg, maybe they've been right all this time that we already have what we're looking for.

Maybe this is it.

Maybe we're here.

Maybe we're "there."

Maybe we can

ABIDE

In This.

BEING PRODUCTIVE

October 20, 2020

"The world can't revolve around me unless I get out of bed."

~Anonymous meme

"Are you breathing just a little, and calling it a life?"

~Mary Oliver

Humans are required to lead some kind of productive life. We have to get things done. We have to achieve, finish, attain.

I mean let's go, already.

So we're always looking for strategies and methods to get us to accomplish things, whether it's getting more money, more acclaim, more fitness, cleaner closets, or more enlightenment.

I wish I could help. But I did pretty much nothing this past weekend, lying in bed and sleeping. Nothing got done- no exercise, no crossed-off to-do's, no painting, no nuttin.

We shall call this, "Wasting My Time."

Unproductive. Unmotivated. Useless.

Shhh, don't tell Mary Oliver, OK? I don't need that kind of judgment in my one wild and precious life.

I wonder though… does the story change if I say I had very minor surgery on Thursday? (No worries, I'm fine). See, then that same do-nothing behavior was actually healing, resting, intentional, and my doing-nothing was on purpose.

Ok, that's allowed.

As long as unproductive behavior can be repackaged as service to some other kind of accomplishment such as rest, healing, or meditation, or as long as we can call it 'presence,' lolling in wildflower fields listening to the birds, then it's OK.

A weekend, a retreat, a vacation, maybe. For a short time.

Because sleep on the couch for 6 months with no obvious gain, no benefit, no contribution to society, no distinguishing this life from that of a slug- and after a while, we have a problem. After a while, we're trying affirmations or reaching out to someone like the Mind-Tickler for sessions, in order to solve the obvious problem of, "What is wrong with me?"

In fact for many folks, non-productivity and non-motivation is a very strong source of depression, anxiety, self hatred, therapy, and motivational tapes.

No, sit around playing video games for "too long," and then this life-gift is clearly wasted. And we mustn't waste.

We must pay for, earn, deserve, this breath, this heartbeat, this life.

I mean, if we don't make some kind of useful action- then what are we doing even being alive? What's the point? What's the purpose? Why bother?

Just BEING is not enough.

Better get busy making something out of nothing. Pronto.

Because nothing is empty. Nothing is bad.

So get busy filling up that emptiness with action.

Luckily there's always more to do. No one ever attains enough productivity.

And luckily there are many options for emptiness-filling. For instance, if we can't prove our right to exist with useful action, then we can just fill up with evaluation and condemnation of our personhood, our self.

At least fill existence with feeling bad about our not-good-enoughness. Of course we're still not getting enough done, but at least we feel bad about it.

Which makes us appear to be a better person.

Not to mention that in order to judge our own productivity and motivation, we have to look back at ourselves, as if outside ourselves, to evaluate how we're doing.

Using productivity as a mirror to prove the self's existence.

Through the mirror we know ourselves. Through the reflection, we know we are there. Getting things done reflects the me.

Productivity tells us how to see ourselves.

Never mind that it's not possible to see ourselves. It's not possible to be both the seer and the seen, the evaluator and the evaluated.

So, fine, we'll just pretend.

All of which is why the only-humans requirement to be productive isn't ever going to go away. It's built in. The sense of being a doer, or a non-doer, or a should-be-a-doer, is firmly established.

So whether we busy ourselves with to-do lists forever, or retire with no plans, or waste time on the couch doing absolutely nothing we're supposed to do,

Or we harangue ourselves forever that we're not doing enough, call that "something wrong" and try to fix it.

Still…

We were born.

Approved or not, earned or not,

we already exist.

Unless existence is stupid, that wasn't an error.

Which means even the useless drooling on the couch me still provides existence with a unique, one-of-a-kind experience.

Which means every one of us is already earning our right to be.

Just by being alive.

Getting stuff done or not.

Which may be a very different way of thinking.

And might feel weird.

Yet still could be anyway, that our unproductive, unspecial, unaccomplished, not-doing-enough life,

Actually is enough,

And that it's simply not possible

To waste it.

ARE YOU EMBODIED?

October 27, 2020

"There are not two things there, there is not somebody who wants to be free from fear. That somebody who wants to be free from fear, IS the fear."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

After a slight dip over the last few months, around the world, unwanted feelings are climbing again. Welcome back, anxiety, worry, panic attacks. Boredom too. And let's not forget anger- so much scream-faced anger.

Oh yay.

We humans spend a lotttttt of time focused on how we feel.

Because feelings matter. They're important. Everybody knows this.

Everybody knows that feelings communicate, having things to say, particularly about who we are. Everybody knows feelings contain meaning about our past, what we need now, our current state of messed-up-ness.

We agree that feelings contain meaning about the me. The important sense of who we are rides on them.

So it seems feelings do many jobs, busy little things that they are.

They certainly can't be ignored. Because then they'll just lie in wait for their opportunity to "get" us later, springing up unwelcome at some painfully unexpected time.

Which is why we must always honor them sufficiently. We must sit with, listen to, validate, honor, immerse, and go inward for more.

Certainly we mustn't take feelings lightly, bypass, or distance from them.

No no, that would be bad.

This viewpoint is everywhere- in therapy, trauma seminars, embodiment workshops, self-help books and podcasts, as well as in woo woo spiritual approaches.

Embodiment - so important.

One of the religions of our time, and not to be questioned. (If you are getting angry reading all this, we'll take that as proof.)

Yes, the body is where it's at.

If by "it", we mean the sense of self.

After all, the body houses the self; it is where me lives, deep inside- located, verified, ensconced.

Along with that delightful sense of broken which comes with personhood.

That's what we're worshipping and embodying.

The self.

Y'know, that very non-thing so many are seeking to see through, via turning-towards.

And then, turning towards feelings, if we're lucky we begin to notice a kind of witnessing, that version of "notice your feelings" so so often provided by sages.

Noticing "the witness" does feel better.

To something.

Although interestingly, this witness separates us from the feelings. Because then there's us the experiencer, us the witnesser, and those feelings- those not-us things being experienced, being allowed, being honored. By us.

Two things.

Hmmm.

How does one get free of a sense of individual self when it's bound to what some singular object feels and experiences?

Now of course none of this is bad. This is how it is for most folks.

It's just that when we're the experience-er, we're by necessity confined, small, buffeted, defined and limited.

Which means embodiment is actually encagement. Enstuckment, ensmallment, enlooking in the wrong placement.

Maybe what we want is not in there.

So instead, if we're curious (not required of course), we might try on the possibility that feelings aren't with us or in us or happening to us. And that maybe we're not the witnesser of them, the sitter-with, the liker or disliker, or the one transcending them.

And maybe feelings don't matter so dang much.

Maybe instead we might try on the possibility that we are them.

Rather than the body.

I mean, consider for a moment that what we are is literally each sensation, each feeling as it passes through, each color, each sound.

And that everything- every anxiety and anger and sadness and joy and quiet- it IS us. We ARE it. They are us.

Then we are all, and we are nothing. We are fluid, fleeting, changeable.

Any sense of placement, of location in a body, of HERE-ness, goes poof.

Existence without me-ness.

Well that's different.

Can't transcend that.

I mean, BEING it, and all.

And untied to feeling and self and meaning and experiencing and location,

we are

untethered. Unbound.

Something

is free.

And whatever it is,

it's unembodied.

AAAUGGHH!

November 3, 2020

"Freedom is a sense of complete denial of control."

~J. Krishnamurti

Yesterday Twitter was moved to post that one word.

At time of my screen shot here, 75k people had sighed, "Yes" with their Like button.

How funny they felt the need to advise millions of humans to do what comes naturally.

I guess because, like everyone who's not in a coma, they could sense all the breath being held all around the world.

Fury and fear are running very high, and climbing.

Though the soaring rise in anxiety, in panic attacks, in terror, and in the oh-look-your-back-teeth-fillings-are-showing rage may perhaps be more than a few deep breaths will be able to ease.

It's not that this is new, particularly. It's just increasingly intense right now.

First because we adorable humans have likes, dislikes, and preferences.

Which alone is no big deal. I mean, there's no way around it, despite all the spiritual advice to not have desires. We still want what we want, even when we're told not to.

So clearly the current world froth is more than just having the preferences.

No, we think our preferences matter. Humans really think what we want is important.

Which means we not only want what we like, we insist what we like is the right way.

There's a right political system, a right financial condition, a right health situation, a right level of spiritual attainment.

There's definitely a right way to live.

I don't think anyone has told existence this, however.

I mean, we may think we are owed a political win, a good unhurting life, money. We may think we are owed non-virus breath, or heartbeat, or life itself.

But it turns out, actually, as far as life is concerned, nothing is promised, nothing is owed us.

Nothing.

Which is not exactly a stress-free position.

Y'know, for us.

And then, barreling right along, once there's a preferred and necessary outcome, human action must be taken, to ensure that's what happens.

Time to get busy being responsible, being proactive, manifesting outcomes, making things move and shake.

Time to obsess about the news, raise fists to the sky or other people, get out the vote. Time to talk endlessly with loved ones to convince them of the right outcome, to gather like minds around us, to cut off people with different likes.

Time to attempt to influence politics, climate, global money, our own money, and of course health, immune systems and length of life.

Oh yes, humans adore the idea that we control things. Big things, little things, every things.

Free will, power of positive thinking, visualizing. Empowerment, baby.

Though this is where fear and anger and despair may start to climb into hyper-ventilation territory.

Because despite the absolute and obvious certainty of thought saying, "I must make xyz happen",

we actually don't know how to do existence's job.

There may be a right way to breathe but breath happens the way it wants and only if it wants, anyway. There's a right way to vote but that US election is going to go its own way, regardless. There's a right way to combat a virus or to know there is no virus or to dance in the streets virus-free, but whatever it is we believe, it still does its own thing.

What Is doesn't seem to know, or give a hoot about, our human beliefs and rules for life.

Which makes outcomes completely out of our hands. Making life and results whatever they end up being, whether we like them or not.

Which leaves every one of us, ultimately, to wait, in order to see what happens.

Even Donald Trump, supposedly a person with enormous power in the world, has to wait to see what happens next.

Just like the rest of us.

Every day, every minute, humans experience our own impotence, our powerlessness.

Which of course, we hate.

And find terrifying and infuriating. We turn into one big walking tantrum: NOOOOOOO! DONT LIKE THIS!

And yet regardless, still- Powerless.

Only.

That is What Is.

We can foam at the mouth about it and say it is wrong and curse and worry about futures.

We can continue to rage against the machine.

And it is still What Is.

So I wonder what might happen if we noticed that yes, we do have preferences and a desire for certain outcomes,

and also noticed that every outcome is out of our hands, regardless.

Maybe we can do what we can- vote, march, converse and advocate-

And also step back and allow existence to drive.

Not because that's the right way.

And certainly not because there's any choice in the matter.

But just because it feels better.

Y'know, to us.

All that anxiety and fury might just go poof.

Not fighting What Is might be an enormous relief.

Surrendering to the absolute power of existence might simply feel better.

And then... Trump wins or he doesn't. Civil war happens or not. The virus continues to be a thing or not. Economic prosperity happens or not.

Life still does as it prefers.

We wait. We watch. We take the passenger seat.

And amazingly, when we're not clenched up with helpless doing,

perhaps just like everything else,

calming breaths,

and maybe even action,

come,

on their own.

Ahhh.

NOT NICE!

November 17, 2020

"The person you are right now is as transient, as fleeting and as temporary as all the people you've ever been."

~Dan Gilbert

This is a rant. There's cursing involved. If this offends, save yourself and read no further.

My new client calls me ‘crude' and quits his sessions, so offended is he by my free and plentiful cursing.

Other clients fume because I rudely interrupt the mind's wallowing, when they want me to "validate" and let it prattle on indefinitely.

Apparently I haven't gotten the memo that I'm supposed to indulge the mind's unending bullshit. Or that I'm supposed to be nice about it.

For sure, I regularly fail at people's desire for me to be a sweet and gentle spiritual Buddha-lady at all times.

Let's face it, they're right. I'm a crude feisty fucking asshat.

Naturally my sailor's language, sarcastic humor and interruptions of whiny self-stories are regularly trotted out as evidence of how unawake I must be.

I do not at all resemble what enlightenment is supposed to look like.

Enlightened people smile peacefully, never mind what happens, stay calm in all situations. They're not impatient, snarky, angry, human.

Unlike this Judy-thingy.

I should git to fixin' that right away.

Perhaps you've noticed that in spiritual circles, there's zero room for any egoic quirk, any rough edge, any anger or fly-uncontrolled-out-of-the-mouth peculiarity.

Only surrendered, accepting, love-is-all-there-is bull is welcome here in enlightenment-land.

Which is a sad limited rule-bound life, if you ask me. But hey, I'm sarcastic and impatient so what do I know.

Nevermind that no one, ever, has actually met those wishful-thinking spiritual requirements for life to be only love and it's-all-good at all times.

I mean, even the sainted Ramana got angry. Guess he had more shadow work to do.

Which is perhaps why my attention was drawn last week to an intense social media "discussion" between some esteemed spiritual teachers. Someone got called a cunt. Someone called another a dick. A popular, well-reputed awake person said, "Fuck off, asshole."

Tsk. So unevolved! So unloving and unenlightened!

Naturally these name-calling, riled-up spiritual leaders felt bad afterwards. This is not how enlightenment is supposed to be presented. What about the image? What about others' opinions? What does this unloving wrongness mean about their awake selves?

Don't worry, they're still enlightened. They made it clear afterwards that they still love each other even though things got reactive.

Though one of them decided this incident means they are "unfinished." Y'know, because there's still anger and quirky self-protection left.

The message is clear. Keep working working working on this nasty rough human until it's shiny and light with perfect love and no unacceptable reactivity.

Only.

Excuse my messy human not-there self, but fuck that.

As if there's somewhere to arrive to. As if we don't contradict ourselves about what we should be, every two seconds. As if it's even possible to get life all cleaned up according to some arbitrary supposed-to's. As if it's more enlightened to follow that set of rules. As if any of that is even a worthy goal.

Pffff.

This sounds just like every finger-wagging etiquette for well-behaved children since kindergarten.

Meanwhile existence is obviously more than ok with every bit of this dramatic excitement. I mean, I don't see any yelling judgmental name-calling assholes on this planet being immediately terminated by lightning or other spiritual punishment, do you?

No, existence says, "Oooh! Food fight!" while we ridiculous humans sit with our hands folded, carefully trying to control and beat the fictitious personality into some bullshit false image of consciousness.

When actually, consciousness includes cursing, anger and disapproved reactions.

The idea that they should be left out is just spiritual propaganda.

Now yes of course these flawed humans are just an image, a façade. What else can we be? Are we going to spend our whole lives polishing a façade?

No matter how awake we think we are, sometimes the façade is a rude bitch.

Let it alone and let it breathe for god's sake.

Because frankly, it is astonishingly freeing to be allowed to be our particular weird, idiosyncratic experience of existence, without fixing according to some woo-woo fantasy of "better."

It is astonishingly freeing to be allowed to be imperfect (whatever that even means,) to be fucked up, to be shadow, to be kindness and variability and inconsistency and not prettiness and fury and love, if that's what's there.

This is the wild, colorful, cornucopia-like stuff of life.

It is already good.

Exhilarating, even.

So all those little rules to be better or more or different than what's already here?

Fuck that shit.

Ain't no one got time for that.

There's living happening.

"The idea that enlightenment means sitting around with a beatific smile on our faces is just an illusion. Every emotion is available to us. To be awake doesn't mean we have fewer emotions available to us. Emotion is just a way that existence functions through us."

~Adyashanti

"People want liberation, but they are also terrified of it. If they completely let go, they fear they'll find a dangerous, deluded person

underneath it all. The sense of Original Sin is alive and well in us. We think that there's something fundamentally black about our nature, that something monstrous will emerge if we let go. We walk around all day in this virtual reality. If we see through it all, and give it up, what will become of us? It's scary. Everything in the end is a defense against nothingness."

~Adyashanti

NOT THE BOSS OF ME!

November 24, 2020

"When you can do nothing, what can you do?"

~Zen proverb

Ok so yes, no one tells us what to do and we are the manifestors of our own destiny, the determiners of our future, and no government or rich politician or power-hungry cabal or wrong-headed parent is going to mess up our lives, by golly.

Power to the people and we're not going to take it anymore and yada yada etc etc.

And yes it's terribly important to have "ownership" of our past choices. *(this sentence lifted directly from a friend's very earnest facebook post this morning.)*

Because if anyone knows what's right, it's us. So we have to hold on tight to the ability to make things as we see fit.

Never mind that once we believe we're responsible, we have to fight everything that tries to wrest command away.

We have no option but to shake an angry fist and furiously scream at whatever may dare attempting to take it out of our hands.

But "no option" means we are actually, y'know… powerless.

Hmmm.

It could be that, in our heart, we know …

We are already being controlled. We have always been controlled.

There has never been any power in our hot little hands.

Whether sitting in school, or forced to go to the dentist, or to eat the broccoli at dinner, or to drive on one side of the road. Whether stopping at red lights, or drinking water, or eating food, enjoying electricity, sitting still at church, getting up each morning to be "productive", working a job whether liked or disliked…

No matter how it seemed….

Someone or something else has always been the boss of us.

Looking back, it's clear we were never in charge of our past, our desires, our thoughts. We were never in charge of what anyone else did or believed either.

All that was also out of our parents' hands, so no point in blaming them.

Today even the "free-thinking" that we are so proud of, is ruled by whatever sources happen to fit with our personal mental filter.

And that filter is out of our control too.

So while we love the idea that we are empowered, or perhaps newly evolved, or newly working an ability to effect change in this world, in actuality none of this is a new development. It's not brought on by current politics or financial systems or 5G or vaccines or AI technology. There is no more control over us happening today than ever used to happen before.

Since humans have been "civilized," going back tens of thousands of years, there have been some who appeared to have more power than others, some who had more apparent possessions, some who lorded it over others and used them, very often unkindly.

And though they didn't know it, those apparent enjoyers of dominance and control had none either.

Because though everyone has always hated this, still for absolutely every human with absolutely no exceptions,

the breath happens on its own timetable. The heart beats until it doesn't. Life comes and goes as it pleases. Nice things happen regardless of any person's hopes and dreams. Painful things happen despite anyone's careful planning.

Now I realize my saying this might make a lot of folks reeeeally angry. How dare I let anyone off the hook and not hold people responsible for all the terrible things going on?

And of course there's no need to agree with me. If it works for you, feel free to demand the right to be personally responsible for all the mistakes, all the idiocies, all the pains humans have inflicted for millennia under guise of being in control.

And though it pains me to even write this, of course if it works for you, continue to fight fight fight against what is completely inherent and unchangeable in this human existence.

Rage and shake a fist to the sky and yell at the gods and powers that be, to let them know of your personal displeasure and non-compliance.

At least all that fighting, fury and froth drums up plenty of adrenaline, getting everyone high as a kite on drama and selfhood.

At least the mind gets a project and an obsession and an absorption in itself and its ever-so-interesting experiences.

Because yes, the mind is completely delighted, completely entranced, by this idea of controlling what happens.

So enjoy.

Although let's face it, none of this is fun. In fact it's misery-making to insist on throwing fists at what can never be changed. Exhausting actually, plus full of failure, guilt, shame, rage and unhappiness.

There is at least one possible alternative, an almost-never-considered option. We could consider accepting what is non-negotiable, surrendering to what is happening anyway, allowing a bit of peace with *What Is*, since it is *What Is* anyway, fought or not.

Naaah. Come on. So dull. So boring. So uninteresting to the mind.

That's just lying down and taking it like a dog. That's not nearly as exciting as huffing and puffing and being filled up with personal responsibility.

Having no free will is such a drag.

I mean, if we accept *What Is*, how can the sense of self remain puffed up with its own importance?

We can't pull the plug on its furious hot-air power-source. Can we?

That would be downright… deflating.

Turns out, accepting that not one whit of it is up to us- lets the air out of the self.

Naturally this is unacceptable to mind.

"What will become of me, then?" it frets. "I'll get walked on, ignored, things will happen I don't like, I'll be dissatisfied."

Yep. Just like now.

Because as it happens, surrender or fight, life goes on just as it always has. Continuing to do as it sees fit. Continuing to give humans an experience which somehow includes the silly delusion that we are in control.

So no, we never have to stop, we can continue pretending to hold on tight to personal power and responsibility.

It's just that not fighting *What Is* may be less tiring. Not fighting *What Is* may be less unfulfilling, less hopeless, less constantly upsetting, less painfully failed.

It's just so much easier to let the air out of the fight.

To let the air out of the self.

I am highly recommending. And I can't help wishing that life might allow this for everyone.

Because like it or not,

that not-me is already the Boss.

Of me. Of you. Of what happens.

And there just doesn't seem to be anything

for any one person to gain

by fighting it.

"You need not do anything.
Remain sitting at your table and listen.
You need not even listen, just wait.
You need not even wait, just learn to be quiet, still & solitary.
& the world will freely offer itself to you, unmasked.
It has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet."

~Kafka

LESS THAN

December 1, 2020

There are about 8 billion heads on this planet and in almost every one of them, some version of one particular idea rolls around.

"I'm not enough." And/or its sister, "I'm not good enough."

Yes we're supposed to think positive and not dwell on the negative. We're supposed to be grateful for what we have. We're supposed to like or even love ourselves. We're supposed to have so much well-being that it spills out into generous helpings for others.

Most of us don't come anywhere close to living up to all that.

Which is perhaps why most of us have secrets.

Let's face it, behind the polite public, "I'm good! How are you?" we know we're not good enough.

How else to explain the ball that suddenly doesn't go over the net in competition against a lesser-ranked player? How else to explain the thought-it-was-ok artwork that no one is banging down the door to buy? What about the book not written, or if written not published, or if published not a best seller?

Surely others don't have this problem. Surely they're enough.

I mean look at those neighbors with more money, the happily married couple snuggling while we spend Valentines Day alone, all those folks not on antidepressants, the enlightened luckys sitting around peacefully enjoying their completeness while we attend yet another silent retreat.

And then there's us, hoping to catch even a whiff of the very grand something that seems to be so very missing...

In our selves.

So much pain in not being enough.

Which is kind of funny when we think about it (laughing yet?).

Because how can something that isn't there, hurt?

Hmmm. Maybe it's not the actual lack that causes pain. Maybe it's what the lack means.

Y'know, about us. As a person.

Whatever that means.

"Oh no, the little ball didn't go in the hole! This means I'm a weak loser not-good-enough player and person." "Oh no, my paintings sit against the wall not earning income! This means I'm an unloved non-artist who should just give up painting, and maybe even life, completely."

Oh yes it goes there. Never underestimate the mind's ability to turn everything into a referendum and absolute failure of the self.

We're obsessed with what things mean about us, what is missing in us, what is wrong with us.

And to feed that obsession we turn to situations and outcomes, asking every given happening to help us figure out our "true nature."

So naturally outcomes like a competition score, a body-type, a house, a grand blissful experience, are what we use to tell us what we are.

Although how do we not notice that none of that is an actual person? A check is not a person, a trophy is not a person, a shape is not a person, a compliment is not a person.

These are indications of a person. Pointers to a person. They're shadows which indicate an object somewhere, but which are not the actual object.

These are hints but nothing actual.

Yet somehow we turn them into, "This result means I AM."

Which as it turns out is all we've ever cared about. All we've ever wanted to do is define and prove a shadow-self which isn't there.

So perhaps it's starting to make sense why almost everyone feels less-than in some way.

We've been right all along. This sense of self feels perpetually not good enough because it isn't good enough.

It's not real, it's not there, and it's not at all what we are. Of course it feels like lack. That's what nothing feels like.

So ok then, what do we do with this?

Well, rather than focus on empowerment and confidence and trying to improve results ("I know I can find a way to get myself to win, dammit!"),

maybe it makes more sense to play with detaching the sense of who we are from outcomes, results, and happenings.

Maybe we don't have to be quite so attached to being defined by an atta-boy, a good-hair day, an enlightenment experience.

Maybe what we are is independent of outcomes.

Even more strangely, more scandalously… maybe it doesn't even matter what we are.

Maybe whether we're good, or nice, or a winner, or even here at all...

absolutely nothing cares.

Maybe results don't matter one whit to existence.

I mean, wouldn't it be something if experience-

all experience including winning and losing and getting and not having-

All of it

turned out to be, in itself,

the point and

dare I even say…

could it even be...

enough.

NEXT QUESTION

December 8, 2020

"I have opinions on everything in this world. You have your opinions, and I can also express opinions and judgments on everything. But my opinions and judgments are no more important than the opinions and judgments of your mother or that taxi driver there."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"Get two spiritual leaders in a room and you'll never see so much smoke being blown up each other's asses. That's how they levitate."

~Aaron Joy

The flattering stranger writes and asks me a spiritual-type question. It's a question about consciousness, awareness, truth, and of course how to get some of that for himself.

Y'know, the usual.

He's looking for understanding, freedom, guidance. He wants to "get it." He's looking to be shown the way. He's looking for magic in an email.

From me.

Aw mister, don't you know I have been disappointing people all my life?

I mean just ask my mother who, though dead, will no doubt drop down from the heavens just to let you know to about my lack of brag-worthy achievements, lack of adequate bank account, lack of necessary beauty, lack of proper personality.

But ok fine, here is this man turning to me as if I can give him something. And though I truly suck at being what people want me to be,

I'm nothing if not polite (cough),

So I do my best to reply. I send a short couple of sentences, consisting mostly of questions turned back to the asker, hoping to intrigue him to ponder.

There! My best attempt at giving him what he wants. He's probably not going to recognize it.

And sure enough, 2 weeks later there's the same guy with the same question, this time on social media asking someone far sager than I. Someone who, after replying with a somewhat repetitious 15 or 20 lonnngg paragraphs added to my couple of sentences, provides all the answer –and then some- that any inquirer could possibly ask for.

Surely now question-guy is filled up with satisfying truth and understanding.

Nope. Turns out question-man enjoys that kind of response very much. He reposts, adds multiple lengthy comments, revels in the windy word count, soaking up all those little letters.

And then... he asks a whole bunch more questions of Answer Sage.

Seems no matter how many posts, discussions, questions, answers, satsangs, podcasts, meditations, there are always still more questions.

Perhaps because questions are a bottom-less pit of never get there.

Perhaps because someone else's answers don't actually answer anything.

Perhaps because the sage's position is not the same as the asker's position.

Since that is literally impossible.

So then the question becomes, should anyone- Rupert, Adya, Grand-Windy-Sage, anyone- actually answer these queries? Ever?

After all, if what is wanted is experiential understanding, what good does some teacher's understanding do for the inquirer?

Words can not create experience, they can only describe it. That's not what is being sought by this kind of asking.

Could it be that depending on Teacher to tell how things are, how Teacher sees things, what happened to Teacher in the past to make that magic happen,

actually encourages any asker to be dissatisfied with his own answers?

If he even looks for them at all.

Because having all these resources and lengthy answers to every question might just make a person not even bother asking himself.

Could it be all this turning to sages ensures seekers don't find their way?

Hmmm.

Maybe if teachers really want to help, they might tell questioners they'll be chasing forever this way,

And then, just shut up.

So that there might be even a moment of silence for the asker to hear his own answers without all the bloviating noise.

Yeah that would be different.

But it's not to be. Because this cuts right to the heart of most teachers' income and follower base.

After all, if people don't seek sages' wisdom and give them an opportunity to spew their views, what exactly do sages have to offer? Why would they keep talking? What needs that unending word spouting?

Surprise! Turns out all those long-winded answers not only fill up askers with wind, they fill up the teachers too.

Sages get to be someone who knows something, someone who has something, someone who generously offers to others who don't have what they have.

Which is just an exaltation of the ego.

Questions and answers validate both selves- asker and answerer.

Kind of the opposite of what people imagine teachers are doing.

Now this isn't to stop the questions from being asked. I realize it feels like they must be asked.

It's just that it's clear, most folks adore this idea of pretending to seek, while actually

intending never to find.

So though I will never be able to give the actual experience inquirers say they want,

and truly no one- no guru, no wise one, no enlightened sage- ever will either…

Still, when asked, I'm willing and happy to keep offering less.

Less pretending, less superiority, less words, less answers, less stringing-along, less…more.

Oh yes, there's plenty more where that less came from.

Everyone is welcome to ask for more of that.

Anytime.

And I also wish for all askers

to enjoy living

Without getting it.

Which is as rich and enlightened as anyone could ever get.

And who knows, might even

answer

every question.

"When you are deluded and full of doubt, even a thousand books of scripture are not enough. When you have realized understanding, even one word is too much."

~Fen-Yang

"If i'm an example then that's great. But I don't have to preach it. I dont have to march it. I don't have to carry signs. I just AM it."

~Dolly Parton

"When the student is truly ready, the teacher will disappear."

~Lao Tzu

HOLIDAY GIFT

December 22, 2020

"Everything you've got on your plate is where the stuff for your enlightenment is."

~Ram Dass

"You are already that which is. But your mind is frightened to let go and still has an idea that something special should happen."

~Tony Parsons

Ding ding! Holiday time!

Today in honor of the season, The Mind-Tickler comes bearing gifts that never go on sale because they're always in such high demand.

A few readers have written to say, as they sit on Mind-Tickler-Santa's lap asking for their heart's desire, that lately the Tickler has not done enough talking about awakening and consciousness in a direct way.

There's been too much about everyday human life, too much about feelings, too much about thoughts, too much how-do-we-deal-with-this.

Too much brown paper wrapping, not enough sparkly special paper and ribbons.

That's not going to get anyone awakened. Let's get with the enlightenment. Bring on the woo!

Which I get. I mean, for many folks it's been yet another year of seeking without finding Enlightenment-Santa and his bag of special treats.

And it's true that often The Tickler uses the struggles and pain of being human as a doorway into the grand cavern of awakened diaper-wearing, meditation-filled caves so many are hoping to enter and never leave.

So maybe the Tickler is tickling the wrong things for the enlightenment chase and we need to be more direct, more to the point, more obvious.

Maybe more like Rupert, who can squeeze the word "aware" into one small place 4 times.

"Only awareness is aware. Awareness is aware of itself." --Rupert Spira

See? That's how it's done. Take a lesson, Judith.

So in hopes the Tickler can redeem itself, let's try to catch up by playing a little holiday game. Maybe this will be the perfect giftie to bring the transcendence so longed for.

So get comfy and close your eyes. Imagine it's cold outside, and snowing. You're all bundled up. Feel the fuzziness inside your mittens, the heaviness of your boots, the icy burn on the cheeks. Smell the crisp air and light snow falling.

Now crunch on up to that nearby house with the warmly lit golden windows and knock on the door. Hear your knock, hear the creak of the opening door. "Ho ho ho!" says the deep voice, "Come in." You enter the warm room, hug Santa and Mrs. Claus (they're Covid-immune), and sit down in front of a warm fire, feel the glow on your cheeks, watch the snow melting on your boots.

And then after enjoying hot chocolate laced with a bit of whiskey (smell it?), it's back outside, lifting knees high to clear the snow as you head home.

Arriving back at your own door, you sit back in your favorite seat and open your eyes.

There you go! A personal visit to Santa's home. And now back to your own home, reading The Mind-Tickler.

But of course that Santa trip wasn't real. It was just pretend, fantasy, made up. It was imagined. You've been here the whole time.

Right?

But what is imagination?

Can you be certain that what just wandered to Santa's house was only a story, not real, and not you, as conscious awareness?

Does consciousness/awareness (Ding! Extra points for using the words twice in two sentences) have to look a certain way to be what you're seeking?

Because if not, perhaps the one difference between what is ordinarily called "real" and what isn't…

Is the body. One trip - the one to your chair- moves the body, and one- the one visiting Santa-doesn't.

And as every nondualist knows and has heard a zillion times, we're not the body.

So if what you are is not the body, or housed in the body, then

We just took as trip to visit Santa, and it was as real as any trip in your body-moving everyday life.

Without the body as determiner of reality, there's zero difference.

Because consciousness (ding!) is everything. It's every color, every sensation, every thought and mental image. It's every idea of you as an individual. It's imagination and ideas and wishes and desires.

It's not just some idealized notion of an altered state of quiet spacey bliss.

Awareness (ding!) is not special like having Christmas morning all the time. It's not fancy or rare. It's everyday, everywhere, everything.

It doesn't come with its own secret language either. Or with dings and extra points (sigh).

Daily life is consciousness. Daily life is awareness. Enlightenment lives in the everyday.

Which means the stuff the Tickler often writes about, the stuff that looks like it's just mundane annoying fervently-wish-it-was-different human foibles, is...

exactly what you've been seeking.

Here it is. Consciousness appearing as you and your loved ones and all those thoughts about the good and bad, the liked and disliked, of all that.

Though you realize of course this also means you are about as real as Santa.

Which may not be the woo you were hoping for. I mean, it's not Rupert or Adya or Parsons, who will happily tell you all this in more enlightened words that rack up the dings.

Still, it's the woo that is. It's the woo of the everyday and everything.

Not grand perhaps, but still consciousness.

So welcome to what has always been here while you looked everywhere for it.

Please enjoy a cookie on Santa.

I'm wishing you all the amazingness of brown paper wrapping, this and every holiday season.

"That one, You, the only one that truly is, is already Conscious Presence. There is no other one."

~Rupert Spira

"What is Self Realization? A mere phrase. People expect some miracle to happen, something to drop from Heaven in a flash. It's nothing of the sort. Only the notion that you're the body, that you're this or that, will go, and you remain as you are."

~Ramana Maharshi

NEW YEAR'S SHOW

December 29, 2020

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women, merely players."

~William Shakespeare

"I admit it's fun
To smear my face with paint,
Causing ev'ryone
To think I'm what I ain't,
Life upon the wicked stage
Ain't ever what a girl supposes."

~Oscar Hammerstein

Oh look, resolution time once again! Self improvement time. Annual How'mIDoin? time.

Time to find love, get the better career, learn life's purpose. Time to learn a new word every day, skip gluten and sugar, meditate, work out. Time to figure out how to transcend that Me-sucker.

Oh let's face it, none of that is probably going to happen.

I mean, year after year we see our flaws and insufficiency. And year after year, we never actually get to making with the sufficiency.

You'd think with all these many many New Year opportunities, that we would have improved ourselves by now.

What're we waiting for?

Well, at least we are clear about what needs fixing; that's a good first step, right? We can't fix what we don't know is broken.

Although, how do we know? What is it does this important self-evaluating, this necessary reporting on not-rightness? What tells us we need to being a better person, thinner, kinder, less failure-prone, better able to cope with feelings?

Well, that would be Me. I review me, and I see what I need to alter.

ME. The self. The personality,

The very thing that we're supposed to be changing.

The poor grade is given to itself, by itself.

Um…. What?

I mean, how reliable as an evaluator is the Me likely to be about itself? How can it look objectively, without skewed filters and agendas, to see what is needed and what should improve?

Perhaps New Year's resolutions are an annual failure because they're not meant to actually change anything. Perhaps they're just a way to enable the self to keep the focus on its one great love- itself.

And perhaps, when we focus on something- when we evaluate what that something supposedly needs- then we are implicitly acknowledging that we are outside the thing we're evaluating.

Meaning, we know we are not it. We know that Me we hope to change is not actually us.

Which means every time we make a New Years resolution, we are admitting we know the self is not what we are.

Still, we pretend. And we pretend with gusto. So leaning in, we say that not only is the flawed self, "Me," but cleaning it up and improving it is our own responsibility.

No one can do it but us.

Of course.

Oh the power. Oh the control.

For our very being, for our personality, for all situations and existence pertaining to self.

It all comes down to us. The center of everything.

Even though, let's face it, we completely suck at this job.

I mean here we are, perpetually resolving to change, new year after new year, and here we are, perpetually failing to change, new year after new year.

If improving this pretend self-thing is indeed our job, then we're exhibiting a breath-taking incompetence right there.

Unsurprisingly that doesn't feel great.

So maybe we could at least give ourselves a break and acknowledge that, if it's possible to transcend and change the self at all, we aren't what does that.

That would seem kinder to us.

Since we didn't write this play. And if we were the authors, this isn't how we would have the story go.

We know this because we keep trying to change the story. We keep having the arrogance to insist that this show, which is not written by us, is not good

enough as is.

Gosh humans are know-it-alls.

But that's the game here. And play-acting is fun. We like putting on a show in the barn.

So we probably will continue making resolutions for things that are out of our hands and out of our ability to even perceive. We probably will continue to keep the Me on center stage. We probably will continue to keep trying to improve a self story that we didn't create.

Even though we know that improving fictions never fixes anything real.

Life upon the wicked stage goes on.

As is.

The playwright doesn't seem to have any need for the characters to change.

Luckily this makes for amazing, surprising, never-predictable entertainment.

Luckily this makes for a far better show than we could ever produce ourselves. And for far more fun and sufficiency than merely wishing for an arbitrarily different first two weeks in January.

And so it is, lovely readers, that I wish you happy new year.

And happy life as is.

And happy good enough,

here upon existence's

wicked stage.

"We are already divine and we are already perfect - as we are. No improvement is needed. God never creates anybody imperfect."

~Osho

"What if we said, "This is the way it is; this is what it means to be human," and decided to sit down and enjoy the ride?"

~Pema Chödrön

"When it's all over, it's time to be a human being in the world again, and that means slipping back into costume and getting back on stage. But now you're actually in the audience, watching the drama. I could never mistake the play for reality again, or my character for my true state."

~Jed McKenna

NOT-OK TIMES

January 12, 2021

"Do you want to know my secret? This is my secret. I don't mind what happens."

~J. Krishnamurti

My friend is very stressed about all the things happening in the world. Upsetting things, not-okay things, chaotic political drama sickness money-fears things.

She's not sleeping, not getting things done, she feels bad.

What she wants is to not be afraid. What she wants is to stay calm.

No matter what.

She wants to not mind what happens, ala Krishnamurti. (see famous quote above)

But let's face it, in general, humans are not fans of terror, depression, shame and guilt.

In general, we do mind what happens.

And when any of that is here so intensely, as it has been lately for so many, the spacey, supposedly-always bliss of enlightened consciousness can start to sound pretty darned good.

Surely enlightenment can step up and provide at least a little calm happy bliss?

If not, what good is it?

I mean, when a guy with a sledge hammer on a 6 inch pole and a Trump flag is coming right for us at a high speed, is a little not-minding-calm too much to ask?

These would be perfect times to not let outside circumstances dictate our internal experience.

Though this "outside circumstances" business does get a little confusing.

Because y'know, "outside" of what?

Outside of the real world, whatever that is? Outside the dream world, which also, um, what?

Are we aiming for calm at all times in the dream, or the real?

Besides, which is which?

Will the real world please stand up?

Lucky for us, thanks to Rupert's constant reminders, we're clear we're the screen and not the movie on it. But still, when the movie involves us no longer breathing, isn't that the real world that's slipping away? Isn't that kind of a drag?

In which world are we supposed to not mind what happens?

So maybe, as an alternative, the self could be afraid and react appropriately to difficult situations without being a robot, and also see the dream of that non-self. Maybe that would be good enough. And maybe we could experience that as peace.

Good news! That actually is the case for all of us.

Don't believe me? No need to take my word for that may-seem-ridiculous statement. No need to take the (many) words of all those teachers who promise ongoing at-all-times calm, either.

Because anyone can take 30 seconds anytime (assuming we even care,) to find this for themselves,

by locating that "part" of us that knows it's OK. ("Part" is not an accurate word but it'll do for now.)

Take a few moments to look, and surprise! There it is. Surprise, it is not upset or afraid or ashamed. Surprise, it 100% knows we're OK.

Oh my gosh. There's a "part" of us which already doesn't mind what happens. That calm-at-all-times thing so many of us want, is already happening.

Even though we may be trembling, or heavy, or shaking a fist and saying, "No way!"

There it is.

Turns out, "not minding what happens" may not mean staying stupid-calm at all times in the face of extreme experiences.

Turns out it may just mean noticing the Us that is OK even right smack in the middle of the character's great dramas.

Perhaps that's what teachers mean when they claim they never get angry, even though to observing mere mortals, they sure do look ticked off.

Perhaps that calm, ok "part" is even what those teachers consider, "themselves."

And since just like them, we too experience both-

the not ok and the ok, the stressed and the peaceful-

Well, that makes us all just like Krishnamurti and those others.

Yep. Us. Same as Krishnamurti.

I know, I know; this is blasphemy.

But still, true. Regardless of whether we know it, have known it, continue to know it, or admit it.

Which means all the effort that's been put into figuring out enlightenment has been a charming but unnecessary struggle to gain...

what is already present.

Even better for us, this separate self -

the one that suffers and wishes things were different and feels like something isn't right-

this separate self is actually the only way anyone can experience anything here in being-alive-human world.

Our reactions and preferences and "minding" are included in the pageantry. And, minding-what-happens is part of that.

So what a relief that we don't have to stop minding what happens.

In the dream, or woke to the dream, or witnessing the dream...

We need both minding and not-minding. And we have both.

We lucky, wide-eyed, outraged, terrified humans watching the news with all kinds of feelings,

We get

to have it

all.

"You will never be satisfied until you find out that you are what you are seeking. If you want knowledge as an individual, you will not get it here."

~Nisargadatta

"What we're looking for is already this. But it is seen by no one. It's possible that something will be seen. But it won't be 'you' that sees it; it will just be seen."

~Tony Parsons

"Listen: this world is the lunatic's sphere,
Don't always agree it's real,
Even with my feet upon it
And the postman knowing my door
My address is somewhere else."

~Hafez

HAPPY ALREADY DAY

February 2, 2021

"I laugh when I think how I once sought paradise as a realm outside of the world of birth. It is the laughter of one who, after having painfully searched for something for a long time, finds it one morning in the pocket of his coat."

~Thich Nhat Hanh

"Whatever you do to be free from the self also is a self-centred activity."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

The Mind-Tickler is officially five years old this week.

Five years of trotting out the spirituality discourse every week. 260+ Tuesdays of take-no-prisoners tickling of the ol' mind. (you can find a lot of them here)

Not surprisingly, they've evolved over that time. As things do. They've become sharper and more hard-edged.

Like machetes.

Five years of using the everyday as a way to cut through and integrate all that spiritual understanding you've been gathering for so long.

Ticklers about enlightenment, self/no-self, reacting and minding what happens. Ticklers about surrender, acceptance, free will, fear, validation, going inward, bypassing, missing out. Ticklers about reality, consciousness, thought, mind, suffering, motivation. About relationships, personality, money, health, death. About identity, humanness, imperfectness, specialness, spiritual scene-ness…

Whew. I need a nap.

Mostly The Mind-Tickler has tried to save you a lifetime of chasing a myth that that can only bring disappointment and failure.

Even though it's been sort of like being Sisyphus.

Because your fascination with what you think you don't have, is endless.

Let's face it, there's always a sense of something not right, something not good enough, something not there. Always a sense of wrongness, not okayness, and needing to be better.

In you.

That sense of missing wholeness has sent you to compulsively read every book, hear every podcast, and quote every wise, Look-What-They-Have-But-I-Don't person out there.

Even though the wholeness, the garden, the rightness being sought - has never actually been in the retreats and podcasts.

Looking for years, decades, lifetimes- and it's not in there. You still don't seem to find.

As if denied the lollipop others get to eat.

Making you want the lollipop all the more.

Though logically we can see this makes no sense. Because focus on any lack, and you're focusing on what isn't there.

As opposed to focusing on what is.

So of course you don't find. Because, isn't there.

Much like that old joke about looking for one's keys where the light is better rather than where they were lost.

OK but still, maybe if you could just get this magic, you'll finally really have gotten something. And then you can rest and be happy.

Because of course you're certain it can be gotten. How? Because those ever-so-helpful teachers, those Masters (such a special name for folks who supposedly know they don't exist,) those special magic-holders who have what you don't- they all say they have it.

Which means it can be gotten. Which perpetuates the sense that there's something wrong with you.

Keeping the sense of self going.

The opposite of seeing through or disillusioning or waking up from the illusion of self.

Thanks, sage Masters!

But come on. No Don't-Know for them. They absolutely do know!

How? Well, they say so. Because of their "personal experience."

Yknow, that highly vaunted, never skewed, completely trustable sieve which only lets in…

what perpetuates and confirms said sieve.

I mean, even the phrase "personal experience" includes the word "personal."

Belying the whole point of seeing through the self. Because if it's personal, it's individual. If it's individual, it's two (or more), and that is

not one.

So instead, wouldn't it be something if we approached this personal-experience idea slightly differently.

Wouldn't it be something if we could get truly personal- and notice that without us, without our sensing apparatuses such as our eyes, our ears - noticing and being aware of awareness and consciousness is not possible.

It is not possible without us. Without these persons. Without you.

Without you, there is no one to be aware, no one to be conscious, no one to be enlightened.

Awareness depends on you to be known.

Which is different from awareness depending on you to exist. I mean, whatever it is, it's here whether you know it, realize it, understand it, attain it, or not.

Here. You already have it.

Now, I know you don't believe the 5-years ancient Mind-Tickler about this.

And that's fine. Awareness doesn't need you to get it.

So instead, try starting here: Show me where you end and awareness begins. Show me where sound ends and hearing begins. Show me where the great wisdom stops, holding itself away, from wherever it is that lacking-you, starts.

I'm pretty sure that'll keep you busy till next Tuesday, when next week's Tickler will attempt once again to help you see what you already have.

And we'll see you,

Where ever that begins and ends,

there.

"You wander from room to room hunting for the diamond necklace
that is already around your neck."

~Rumi

WHAT IT BE

February 9, 2021

"You can wish your life away, or you can live it."

~Agnes Bookbinder

"Whatever you're given can wake you up or put you to sleep."

~Pema Chödrön

Yesterday I broke my own rule and gave a dance friend advice she hadn't asked for.

Yep, it went about as well as you'd imagine.

My friend had posted her anxiety that it's going to be a long time until we can return to dancing.

Let's face it, most likely she's right. I mean, only a few disbelievers are going to rush out to get their faces within inches of other folks, sweating and breathing heavy all over them, in enclosed places for hours, just for fun. (Last fall, a couple hundred rebels did just that, many got sick, and 12 died.)

Of course it's not just dancing where incomes, connections, venues, arts, and activities disappeared. Worldwide, folks are isolated, lonely, lacking so much, afraid for the future and wishing things were otherwise.

Really, just like always.

So yes anxiety has been all over social media feeds.

And till now I've done pretty well with keeping my personal take on this to myself, since people have a right to find their own way without my two cents.

This time though, like a couple of other times, apparently the gods had had enough and Judy's fingers began to type.

Because the thing is, I work with a lot of anxious and depressed people. Every day.

More than that, I haven't struggled in this pandemic. In fact, I've kind of liked it (she says, ducking for cover.)

That's not to say I don't miss dancing and hugging and the unconcerned, unthinking normalcy of my former everyday life. I would happily have all that back in a heartbeat.

But it's not coming back soon, and when it returns, most likely much will be different.

Which means I get the chance to watch these times we're living in become an actual day-to-day example,

a kind of primer, if you will,

of how woo-woo nonduality actually intersects with that which we've all agreed to call, "real life,"

Actually integrates. Actually gets lived.

Rubber hitting the road.

As opposed to intellectually being just very nice in concept.

I mean, there are always a zillion such opportunities. But just by being so widespread,

the pandemic offers spiritual types the opportunity to walk their talk.

Because quite truly, THIS IS IT.

Don't like it? Still IT. Wish things were otherwise? Still IT. Want to hug your grandkids, get your job back, not worry about being alive tomorrow?

Yeah.

We can yearn and regret and cry and try to control forces way bigger than we.

And life continues to be what it is and it ain't changing just because we don't want it.

This is not theory. Not conceptual. Not intellectual.

It's just existence. As it is. Which includes death and poverty and fear and loneliness and not knowing what to do and not getting what we want.

Fighting that feels awful. Fighting for control we don't have, fighting to make things our way when we have zero power, brings anxiety. Screaming "But I don't want it this way!" causes suffering.

Ours.

Not to mention that we don't know everything, or see everything. We only know our own tiny little filtered viewpoint. There is so much that never enters our screen.

How do we fix what we don't even know about?

Thinking our limited experience on this planet ever provides enough of the big picture to actually fix existence, makes humans crazy.

Because, don't know. Because, believe lies. Because, confirmation bias. Because, arrogance, know-it-all-while-knowing-nothing, insignificance.

Because This Is It.

So we might find it easier to adapt. We might find it easier to yield.

In fact, we might find it easier,

even revelatory,

to BE existence,

rather than see ourselves as outside it, evaluating, directing, and fighting life.

Being experience, being life, being fear, being others, being advice, being rule-breaking, being reaction.

As opposed to the one experiencing and witnessing and evaluating all that.

This brings conceptual nonduality to a screetching "real-life" integration.

This, is truly, "only one."

Yeah yeah fine, but who cares? Especially when there are "real" problems and worries.

Well of course no one has to care.

But if we're really tired of anxiety and suffering, it could be that even just considering this shift in viewpoint,

even when it feels like we're not doing it "right,"

can help anxiety fade away.

On its own.

Even if circumstances do or don't change.

Because BEING what is

IS

what is.

And that

turns out to BE

everything.

"You are convinced that if
You can but manage...
Your mind
Your money
Your breath
Your energy
Your body
Your faith
Your relationships
Your prayers

You will unlock the door
To peace, happiness and contentment.

Guess again."

~Ram Tzu

NOTHING IS EVERYTHING

February 16, 2021

"When there's nothing, there's nothing to be afraid of. You project something ONTO nothing and that's what's fearful."

~Byron Katie

"To see the separate self clearly is to see its non-existence."

~Rupert Spira

"Within a second, the self returns, saying, "What the hell was that?"

~Richard Sylvestor

Recently someone told me about a spiritual writer who had had a big enlightenment experience, experiencing a seeing-through of the self, and then carrying around extreme fear about that for a few years.

This grandly-enlightened person got a glimpse that they were nothing, after being pretty darned certain for all of their life that they were something.

As most folks do.

And understandably that could be felt like a giant loss, like a sort of death. After all, there was a me there, and then… nothing. Yikes.

Still, it's odd, don't you think? I mean, if this person saw that we're nothing, then what was afraid?

Nothing, that's what.

Certainly consciousness wasn't afraid of disappearing.

Because where would it go- the island of lost selves?

No, for that author, the thing that was afraid could only have been the self. The one supposedly done away-with.

Fear was simply a subtle way of validating the me who had lost something.

Besides, for them to have lost the self, there had to have been a self there in the first place, something which could get lost. And this one went missing. Just up and left.

All those years that self was there, and all it took was for them to see that it wasn't there.

And then boom, self was outta here.

As if simply their seeing made the difference between self and no self.

Though of course, if there's no self, then there's never been one. If we're nothing, we've always been nothing.

And life has gone on.

Seeing it, changes nothing.

Nothing is lost either way.

Now I realize that for many folks, maybe even you, this type of stuff makes zero sense.

"Of course there's a me. I'm right here. Jeez."

To those readers I'd just say, if you are something, show it to me.

Literally show me your self.

You're not skin, bones, muscles. You're not air around a body. You're not electricity. You're not light.

None of those things are a self.

Those are things or ideas representing, standing-in-for, substituting for, a self.

A representation isn't the real thing it represents.

Ok so, so far we're finding nothing.

Which is apparently all we actually are.

And yet, even so, we may begin to notice the necessity of these bits of nothingness.

That color- it's happening in our eyeballs.

No eyeballs, no color.

The color is us.

That sound? Happening in our ears. That sensation? Happening in US.

Like a tree falling in the woods. Making no sound until it's heard.

Without us to experience, what is here?

Turns out all experience goes through the fulcrum of us.

Making us required, integral, necessary, to the experience of experiencing.

There is literally nothing without us.

Because everything is made of us.

Which makes these self-nothings, not nothing, but everything.

And that can never be lost.

Ok so fine, what's the point?

Well, us. We are the point. The unique experience of these snowflakes. Everything. Experience. Existence. Us.

We are the point.

This is what that spiritual author's fear obscured, in their newly represented enlightened version of self. ("This is me, the one who is enlightened and terrified.")

It starts to be clear how so many spiritual seekers work so hard and yet can't find.

Because nothing can't find nothing.

And Everything is already here, completely unhidden, right here in plain sight.

Where or why would we get busy looking for that which is already here?

Yes the mind wants to be something. Yes, we don't want to be nothing.

And yet nothing is indeed what we are.

And also, we are everything.

The circuits may begin to fry at this point.

Because paradox sometimes does that to a mind that wants straight-line, logical explanations and realizations.

Still, it's quite something.

And also, quite nothing.

And also, quite

Everything.

"Being nothing, you are everything. That is all."

~Kalu Rinpoche

"Body is nothing more than emptiness,
emptiness is nothing more than body.
The body is exactly empty,
and emptiness is exactly body...

Nothing is born, nothing dies,
nothing is pure, nothing is stained,
nothing increases and nothing decreases...

Which means...

Gone,
gone,
gone over,
gone fully over.
Awakened!
So be it!"

~The Heart Sutra (Partial), by Avalokiteshvara, Bodhisattva of Compassion

FIXING YOU

March 9, 2021

"Suffering is delusion and delusion is the spice of life. Without that there are no love stories or shoot-em-ups or sitcoms, just 24-hour nature programming."

~Jed McKenna

"People are suffering under the torture of the fantasy self they're failing to become."

~Will Storr

"The belief that something is wrong is the fire under the ass of humanity."

~Jed McKenna

When I was little I wanted to stay inside and read rather than go outside and play with other kids. My mother would throw me out of the house for some "fresh air," and I'd sit on the steps and read there until she let me back in, while a few feet away the neighborhood kids played together.

My not wanting to be social was a clear personality flaw. One among many I proceeded to spend years trying to fix.

So I learned how to socialize; I learned to be more comfortable in crowds.

I learned be an excellent fake.

Though 60 years later I still don't want to go out and play.

And the Judy character has still not measured up to what it is supposed to be.

The thing is, has anyone?

Let's face it, everyone is messed up in some ways. None of us are right, according to the rules of personhood.

We're either too angry or too isolated or too unloved. We think we're not a good parent, not kind enough, not grateful enough. Maybe we're not attractive or motivated or productive enough.

The problem seems to be particular to us. I mean, look our have-it-together friends, or those people we read about, or those enlightened masters who've transcended the self.

These folks show what we could and should be.

Never mind that our friends may not have our particular imperfections but they have others. Never mind that, despite great wisdoms and understandings, every single guru has held on tight to personality flaws. Alan Watts drank and did drugs, Nisargadatta chain-smoked, Krishnamurti was known for love affairs and extravagant living, Mooji quite enjoys his meals and sex and adoration.

Turns out the people we compare ourselves to, also don't have what we think they have.

Regardless, we are completely certain that being a messed-up human is not ok, and that these things must forever be polished, fixed, bettered and

altered.

Because it doesn't seem possible that we can't someday have success changing the personality, if only we do things right. After all, some addictions get quit, some mouths stay zipped, some exercise keeps depression away.

For a while.

Yet even in those best case scenarios, an inherent sense of Something's not right remains.

Because do any of those changes actually alter whatever it is we really are?

Does suddenly starting to file taxes on time actually change the personality?

It could be simply that all individuals are quirky and unique. Just by definition and nature of "individual."

It could be that this is what comes with "separate", that not-rightness is what comes with the presentation of a separate, unique self.

Making imperfection a requirement. Built in. Not going anywhere.

That possibility sure makes our lifelong attempts to clean up and transform these selves into something more alike and acceptable start to look like a losing proposition.

Meanwhile, if we were watching a movie, would we demand that all the characters be calm, loving, successful, productive, grateful? Would we demand that no character be nasty, smoke, fail?

Do we need all actors on a screen to be the same?

Could it be possible that even when we hate the characters, we also love them for what they bring to the show?

Perhaps the perceived imperfections we try so hard to change in ourselves are not going anywhere because

they're part of the fun.

Maybe the messier the character, the better.

Maybe this show is adored.

Now I realize this may be upsetting, maybe even infuriating.

To consider, "This is IT" in this regard goes against absolutely everything we've ever known.

Even though clearly, this is it.

That includes these all-wrong personalities. That includes dissatisfaction and self hate and wishing we were different.

We're never going clean up the human mess we take ourselves to be.

We think it's supposed to be otherwise. But that thought is delusional.

Because it has never been otherwise.

This is the game.

Perfect in our imperfection, we're playing it perfectly.

So maybe we can play with accepting this messy wrong thing instead of spending a lifetimes trying to make it identical to all the other individuals.

Maybe we can finally just

Leave it the hell alone.

Because it's just possible that existence

knows how it likes its movies.

"Right there in the imperfection is perfect reality."

~Shunryu Suzuki

"Drop the idea of becoming someone, because you already are a masterpiece. God has himself created you, you cannot be improved."

~Osho

ANXIETY, DEPRESSION & ANGER, OH MY!

March 16, 2021

"The body is a safe refuge for the sense of 'me.' It is rarely discovered there."

~Rupert Spira

"The illusionary 'I' grabs the feeling and runs with it."

~Gary Tzu

"Every separate person lives in suffering and that drives them for a solution."

~Tony Parsons

We all know so many folks, maybe even ourselves, who are trying to handle anxiety, anger and depression.

"Handle" being a euphemism for, "Get rid of."

Because let's face it, no one likes these feelings. Everyone wants them gone.

Which might be a bit odd.

Because over the millennia, existence has gone out of its way to provide many feelings of sadness, anger, pain and fear (along with other feelings), not just to people but to all living things,

only for humans to reject and try to get rid of them as fast as possible.

Kind of like the family cat bringing home a dead mouse and proudly laying it at our feet, only for us to scream, "Eeewwww NO!" right in its generous little face.

No, we'd much rather focus on getting more of what we fondly call, "our true nature" –joy, love, compassion and bliss.

Because to us, anything else may be nature but it ain't true.

And yet, despite years attempting to control what we feel- the medications, therapies, inquiries, meditations, and enlightenment-seekings-

"bad feelings" still somehow remain.

Hmm. Maybe we've been missing something in the handling of this problem.

Maybe rather than striving endlessly to make feelings behave as we want,

we might notice for a moment just how very very important they seem to be.

Humans are obsessed with how we feel.

Feelings drive our whole life. Good feeling- good life. Bad feeling- problem, bad life, must fix, control and make it what we want.

Not to mention the compulsion to find meaning in every sensation, every heaviness, every tightness.

Feelings mean how we're doing and what is in store for us and whether we're healthy or broken.

Meaning about us.

MEaning.

In sensation.

"Oh no, a contraction! This means I am broken, doomed, a waste of life. I am afraid. This is who I am."

We are defined. Feelings tell us who we are.

Feeling is where the self coalesces.

It can't be ignored. Because it is required in order for the sense of self to pretend to be something.

Hence, the obsession.

Even though sensations have no ability to contain meaning about the past, or mental health, or whether we've done something wrong.

Tightness or heaviness can't mean something about a Me that doesn't exist.

Could it be sensations are an impersonal happening having nothing to do with us?

If so, then instead of labeling and obsessing about vanquishing them,

maybe we could just leave them alone.

Because maybe they're just not so all-fired important.

Now to be clear, the Tickler is not saying don't feel, or bypass, or distract.

It's just that perhaps we could leave feelings alone to do what they do, considering the possibility that they have nothing to do with the self.

This all-encompassing obsession may be a not-necessary trick of mind.

Trying on this possibility might bring some considerable surprises.

Because without piling importance onto random sensations, a person might find themselves

High. Blissed out. Joyful.

From experiencing the exact same fears, sadnesses, angers we've been trying to get rid of.

And of course no one has to believe any of this.

Still, this is not new. Mystics, monks and tribal cultures have always known that leaving feeling alone to do its thing,

without making a self out of it,

brings something quite different,

and paradoxically may transform those very same hated feelings,

and even that very same supposed self,

into exhilarating, amazing and even fun experiences.

Completely without us.

Which brings a lightness that feels

Not uncomfortable at all.

And in fact may even feel

pretty darn good.

"Suddenly you're ripped into being alive. And life is pain, and life is suffering, and life is horror, but my god you're alive and it's spectacular."

~Joseph Campbell

"The purpose of emotions is to let a streaming beauty flow through you."

~Rumi

"Let everything happen to you. Beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final."

~Rainer Maria Rilke

ASKED. ANSWERED

March 23, 2021

"There are no authorities in an imaginary world."

~Michael Markham

"Have you asked you?"

~Byron Katie

"Every separate person lives in suffering and that drives them for a solution."

~Tony Parsons

The man, proudly proclaiming himself a seeker, intimately asks on my Facebook: "WHAT IS YOUR TEACHING?"

Well, intimately asks me and about 2 dozen others.

It seems I have stumbled unknowingly onto American Idol. I hadn't realized I'm auditioning.

I reply, "I have nothing for you."

He doesn't catch the plural meanings and dismisses me promptly.

He's annoyed that I don't tell my surely-fabulous enlightenment story, don't expound on what life is like now that I'm wise, don't take vast chunks out of my life to devote to filling a stranger in on the great secrets that worked for me.

He's annoyed that I feel no obligation to answer simply because he asks.

Rude.

And spared.

Meanwhile, apparently everyone else he asked- every one of those important and less-important leaders in spirituality- answered his demanding questions.

So eager they apparently all are to present themselves as having wisdom, and to tell how they see things.

I don't get it.

I don't get the tradition of seekers asking questions of teachers.

I don't get the value of satsang, where people ask wise ones how things are.

I don't get spiritual leaders expounding on their origin story, their lineage, or how to see the world and awareness and consciousness, according to that person.

I don't get collecting sages' answers, like my new buddy is doing.

What I especially don't get, is why so-called teachers, answer.

Because exactly whom does it help for answerers to do all the work for the askers?

Do teachers think no one but themselves can find their own way? Are askers too feeble-minded to answer their own questions?

And of course, these wise answers can't be understood more than intellectually anyway.

Because they're someone else's.

Seekers want answers. As long as someone else gives them.

They hand over their agency, sit back and wait to be told how it is.

How easy to become prey to grifters this way.

Why is anyone being asked to carry them?

And why are teachers so eager to do so?

Besides, have seekers not noticed that teacher don't all give the same answers?

Some go through the dark night of the soul, some are suddenly touched with magic, some claim to experience bliss forever, some get it and lose it, some are terrified, some lose the sense of purpose and stew in, "What's the point."

It seems consciousness does not find one perfect awakening experience and then pump out replicas and stop being so infinitely creative from here on out.

Which means, despite everyone's certainty that their way is THE way, experience is completely individual and variable.

So seekers may as well find their own. Since that's how it's going to be regardless.

So. You're a seeker and you want answers?

ASK YOU.

Ask and wait. Ask and answer.

Be extremely literal. Be extremely rigorous. Don't settle for BS non-answers like, "It feels like I'm right here," with your hand waving aimlessly in the space 6 inches in front of your forehead.

Where, exactly? Point to it. Literally.

Locate. Is it the forehead, the brain, the body in the chair?

Do bodies- elbows, earlobes, skin- send ideas in the middle of the night, when you're lying half-asleep in bed?

And that highly-touted sense of self- what knows it's there? Where exactly is this knower?

Specifically.

Ask, "What actually knows this answer, and how does it know?"

Ask, "Is this a theory or something I can prove?"

Ask, "Where is my proof, other than that I think it, or other than that some teacher said it? How do I know this?"

Accept no vagueness, and you'll probably eliminate answers like, "It's light. It's energy. It's brain, heart, a feeling, awareness."

Find proof. Find what cares.

Then maybe you can move on to your next answers.

Yours.

Not Krishnamurti's. Not Byron Katie's. Not Rupert / Robert / Tony / Ramana / or Nisargadatta's.

Certainly not mine. Because no amount of me or anyone else saying, "This is how it is,"

Is actually

How it is.

And once your own answers come,

you may find you don't care what anyone else's are.

Making "seeking"

a no-thing.

"You seek the path? I warn you away from my own. It can be the wrong way for you. May each go their own way. I will be no saviour, no lawgiver, no master teacher unto you. You are no longer little children. One should not turn people into sheep, but sheep into people."

~C.G. Jung

"There is nothing you can learn from me or anyone. What then is a Master for? To make you see the uselessness of having one."

~Anthony de Mello

"When the student is truly ready the teacher disappears."

~Lao Tzu

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

March 30, 2021

"No decision, no fear."

~Byron Katie

"The choices that will be made will be made, and you've no choice about that."

~Jeff Foster

Years ago during the height of the last recession, it suddenly came to me to sell the sun-drenched, window-filled, ocean-view condo I'd been living in in California for over 12 years.

I knew instantly it was the right thing to do.

I shared the idea with my then boyfriend/co-owner of that beautiful place, expecting his immediate, very reasonable ‘no.' But somehow selling seemed right to him too.

We set to work. The place sold quickly, in a bidding war, even in the heart of recession.

There was nothing but calm.

Fast forward to a few weeks later. Calm? Please.

There was crying, there was mourning, there was rethinking, regretting, revisiting.

There was redeciding.

Over and over and over and over.

What have I done? Have I made a mistake? What am I walking away from? What am I walking TO? Have I made a mess of everything, ruined my life, screwed my future and my boyfriend's, forever?

For months afterwards.

Um, Judy? *Hellooo*. *Knocking on head.*

Idea came. Realtor was chosen, condo was prepped, cleaned, painted, listed, and sold.

And here I was, like a hamster, re-running over it all, again and again.

As if my now-panicked, now depressed review of the pros and cons mattered one whit.

As if the decision had not been already made.

Now, all these years later, I'm watching various clients struggle similarly with decisions.

Decisions that have also already been made and acted on.

Take a new job? (which has already been started.) Stay with the spouse? (while not moving out for years). Keep the sick dog going? (while doing 3x daily pillings and bi-weekly trips to the vet).

There are pro-cons lists and visions of an unsalvageably messed-up future and questions about competence and confidence and worth.

While the body and life live out the already-finished decisions.

Finished for now, anyway. Until the idea to do something else shows up.

Such an odd thing that only humans do.

I mean, my cat gets up and walks into another room. She doesn't make the change and then think, "Hmmm, did I make a mistake coming in here?"

And how funny that we don't notice that ideas come*TO* us.

Standing in the shower, or walking the dog, or drifting off to sleep, we are handed a gift, a surprise, an unasked-for idea.

We don't have to earn it or be deserving. Pop! There it is, coming into our heads.

From "out of the blue." Falling into our laps. Quietly. From somewhere else.

Somewhere not driven or seen or known by us.

And then we say *I*made a decision.*I*did this.

Graspy humans taking ownership of something that happened to us.

And then we get busy rudely turning the gift over and over in our hands, evaluating its merits, as if it was our work and our doing and our idea and we are the arbiters of whether it's good or bad.

Like we would have any idea.

Apparently we think our participation is required. Apparently we think it's necessary to control something that came on its own and is not ours to control.

Unsurprisingly, this theft of ownership of decisions feels awful.

Hello self-blame, regret, fault and desperation to psychically figure out what the future will bring.

And we do all these mental gymnastics despite the fact that the decision itself has already come with calm. It's the ownership and rethinking and psychic guessing that brings the anxiety and worry.

It seems things run smoother and sweeter without our frantic, useless, input.

But nevermind that. Let's climb on the wheel and keep redeciding.

So the next time there's a decision needed, maybe we might try something different. Maybe we might ask, and wait, and listen, and

just follow the quiet, peaceful, popped-in suggestion.

Trusting the calm feeling to be the guide, when the inevitable doubt starts spinning.

Without questioning, without reviewing, without cross-examining and grilling the idea to death.

Kind of like trusting The Force. Rather than the Jedi.

I mean, can you imagine a Jedi saying, "Gee I don't know if The Force is right. I better figure this out myself."

Humans are irrelevant to the process of "deciding".

The Force does all the work.

It might be easier to trust it.

It's going to do its thing regardless.

That would save humans a whole lot of terrified spinning.

Allowing access to the calm we wanted to attain in the first place by making the "right' decisions.

I mean, it's possible it would feel better to not second-guess The Force.

And it's also possible that Jedis have a lot more fun

and a lot bigger worlds

than hamsters.

"Since one can't decide to think
Nor can one decide
Thoughts' contents,
Why does one
Claim their ownership?
Is every sound Wu Hsin's because
He can hear them?"

~Wu Hsin

"I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction, and if not how shall
I correct it?
Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,
can I do better?
Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows
can do it and I am, well,
hopeless.
Am I going to get rheumatism,
lockjaw, dementia?
Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.
And gave it up. And took my old body
and went out into the morning,
and sang."

~Mary Oliver (edited)

DOERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

May 11, 2021

"He who thinks he is the doer is also the sufferer."

~Ramana Maharshi

Last week, as maybe you saw in my note to you, I tried, after recent surgery, to write a new Mind-Tickler.

It did not get finished.

Doer-Judy failed.

I mean, shouldn't I have been able to pump that baby out and be back in bed with the chopped-up foot elevated by noon?

But no. Because who are we kidding?

Whatever creates The Mind-Tickler, whatever sends the ideas, whatever removes without mercy some of my favorite bits, whatever abandons one completed Tickler at 6pm the night before, insisting on starting another even if it means I'm still writing at midnight…

whatever that is,

It does what it wants. I am merely its typist.

Now granted, lovely Mind-Tickler readers may be dubious of this apparently spiritually-correct claim.

Perhaps because, while most folks generally love the idea of nondoership, when it comes to living everyday life,

most really don't believe a single word of it.

What we *do* believe is that stopping smoking, drinking or overeating is up to us, that we can make ourselves live longer with exercise and cauliflower, that we can force ourselves to clean the house, be more productive, not get triggered by family. And that, by the power of our meditation practice, inquiries, and studying up on Krishnamurti, we can *will* enlightenment to happen.

Nondoership is a grand spiritual idea when it comes to the weather, but not if it means our politicians are no more the doer than we are.

No, in everyday life, humans are consistently and furiously insistent that it's all up to us.

Little ol' us, who actually has zero idea how to not say something stupid, or bring the nice feelings.

Sure, let's insist these mixed-up, flawed selves have more power over events and likes and thoughts and feelings than existence has.

The self t*akes* - as opposed to being given- responsibility, blame, fault, and accountability.

The finger always points to the self.

In fact, dare to suggest responsibility is not ours, and folks get downright crabby. Outraged, even.

"*Don't tell me this isn't someone's fault! A good person takes accountability! How dare you let humans off the hook!*"

We actually fight for the ideas of right actions, consequences, guilt, and shame.

Not noticing that all those ideas apply only to doers.

And that every one of them feels like crap.

So we might wonder what wants human responsibility so much that it ignores all the misery that comes with it.

And what tries to have it both ways with the ol' *sometimes* ploy?

"*OK yeah, I'm not the doer of rain but I decide to lift my arm or quit my job or have another beer. I am in charge of yelling, liking clean countertops, and being uncomfortable in crowds. So sometimes I AM the doer.*"

Doership is not a sometimes thing.

We either *are* the doer- in which case shouldn't we be much better at it by now?- or we're not.

It's one or the other. Because control doesn't come and go.

If it does, then we're not in control of control.

Existence always does as it pleases. The self just takes the credit or blame.

Meanwhile, this may be where the mind helpfully chimes in, "*But if we're not in control, we'll weigh 500 lbs, politicians will go unchecked, jobs won't get done. There will be chaos, unproductivity, failure, and death in the streets.*"

All of which is nonsense the self drums up to sustain its own delusion.

We've never been the doer and things have always happened and gotten done, anyway.

So nothing actually changes by considering that we're not responsible for absolutely everything.

It's just that the weight of thinking we're supposed to know how to do existence's job-

Well, it's heavy.

Responsibility makes the self fearful, sad, self-hating. Doership makes the self feel real, important, and necessary.

Perhaps that's a burden we don't have to carry.

Perhaps it could be lighter to smoke, or try to quit, knowing it's a happening whose decision and outcome may not be up to us. Perhaps it could be lighter to fight the political fight or leave an abusive situation, knowing these are happenings that will go as existence pleases.

Perhaps it's possible to feel lighter, while living the exact same life, just without self recrimination and fault.

Who knows, we might even discover a sense of peace, curiosity and fascination, as we watch to see what happens

without us.

What a relief, letting responsibility slide off onto existence's broad shoulders,

where it's actually been all along.

"The freest of my actions just happens like hiccups inside me or like a bird singing outside me."

~Alan Watts

"Who grows the oranges in the orange tree? Who grows the grass? Who takes care of the world and the earth? The same power that takes care of all the things on this planet."

~Robert Adams

NORMAL YOU

May 18, 2021

"The separate something looks for wholeness."

~Tony Parsons

"We suffer from a hallucination, a distorted sensation of our own existence as living organisms. Most of us have the sensation that "I myself" is a separate center of feeling and action, living inside and bounded by the physical body.

Because it is a hoax from the beginning, the personal ego can make only a phony response to life. For the world is an ever-elusive and ever-disappointing mirage only from the standpoint of someone standing aside from it."

~Alan Watts

Over the years, there've been a handful of statements which so many people have said to me in sessions that I've come to wish I had $1 for every time they were said.

In this way I could now be writing The Mind-Tickler from my yacht.

But no, I'm still waiting for dollars to rain from the sky whenever people open their mouths.

The Tickler has covered a few of these *Everybody-Says-'Ems* before.

Today is, "Am I normal?" day.

"Is this feeling or thought normal? Am I irretrievably f'd up? Is there something wrong with me? Other people don't think this, right? You must agree that I am especially a problem, it's worse for me than for anyone else. I am the only one, or at least I'm worse than everyone else. I am NOT normal."

Some version of this script might sound familiar.

That would be because, despite what thought says,

you're just like the rest of us.

Which is, y'know, another way of saying "normal."

Which may or may not be believed.

So what does it mean, anyway? What makes something not normal?

Let's ask Mr. Dictionary.

Normal: conforming to a type, standard, or regular pattern: characterized by that which is considered usual, typical, or routine.

Hmmm, apparently it's about numbers, comparing to a "type."

Normal requires others. Lots of them. All acting and feeling as one unit, one pattern, one routine. A typical, usual, same unit.

All those others somehow having escaped the quirky weirdnesses of being human.

Unlike you- the loner weirdo- living outside the majority.

A distinct individual. A person.

By definition not included in a larger, better, happier, healthier, whole.

Could it be that the longing for normality is actually a longing to be inside this inclusive, all-encompassing, one-ness?

To be part-of, one with, the much-bigger-than-you?

There you are, yearning to get back to the garden, where everything is perfect, where you're not missing out on the vast, spacious otherness which envelops everyone else?

(Is this not what enlightenment seekers are after as well?)

At the same time, in direct contradiction to the desire to feel normal feelings and think normal thoughts and be a normal person,

you also enjoy being "different" and standing out in some way. You work hard in various ways to make that happen, and maybe even take offense at all this talk about being normal.

As in, "Not me! I don't care about normal!"

Which makes sense too. After all, everyone has a lifetime of creating and defending this not-blended-in person.

No one is going to be in a hurry to throw out all that hard work and say, "Ok, there's no me, I'm just a not-special, not-distinctive part of a whole."

No, the self lives on.

Even if it hurts.

Even if it comes with a constant sense of not good enough, and something wrong, and incompleteness, aloneness, insufficiency.

Because of course any one separate person *has* to be limited, and never able to be as vast as the unlimited whole.

Of course it's insufficient and not enough.

Oh well, at least you know who you are as a person.

So ok, is there any way to change this, fix this, eliminate the contradictory desires to be a special and distinct individual, and also be a normal blended-in-‘er like all the others?

Both?

As in, is there any way to attain a sense of completeness *for* the individual, from *outside* the individual?

Well, that would mean there are two things.

That would be a funny kind of completeness.

I mean, if it doesn't include you, how complete and whole can it be?

So instead of asking a trick and unanswerable question, what if it was possible to set aside thinking about the body as you for a moment.

Not because there's anything wrong with identifying as a body, just as a way to try something different.

What if it was possible to consider whatever it is that animates the body and brain, whatever it is that feels like the essence of you, whatever it is that is not the body, and

see if it's limited, contained, incomplete.

See if it has a beginning, an end, a place where it isn't.

See if there are any selves outside it. See if it leaves any person out.

See if there are any persons at all.

See what happens to the question, "Am I normal?" after these questions.

It could be that the self is indeed incomplete, and that it doesn't matter one bit.

Because it's not what you are.

It could be that, despite thought saying otherwise,

not-normal you has always been included and part of the greater whole

anyway.

Perhaps it's not possible to be "not normal."

Because perhaps you're everything, without limit or end.

Which might be as normal as it gets.

And which might make life far richer

than having a yacht.

"I am someone I would have never imagined. A secret. A dream. Burn me. Drown me. Tell me lies. I will still be who I am."

~Alice Hoffman

"I never told you there was anything wrong with you. If I made you, I filled you with passions, limitations, pleasures, feelings, needs, inconsistencies. How can I punish you for being the way you are, if I'm the one who made you? What kind of god would do that?

My beloved, this life is not a test, not a step on the way, not a rehearsal, nor a prelude to paradise. This life is the only thing here and now and it is all you need."

~Baruch de Spinoza, speaking for God

ONE EGO DEATH, PLEASE

May 25, 2021

"When he was dying, J. Krishnamurti's doctor stayed in his room with him for longer than usual. When the doctor came out, everyone wanted to know what they talked about, suspecting some great revelation had been passed on. The doctor said, 'We were having a wonderful time discussing Clint Eastwood movies. We are both Clint Eastwood fans.'"

~Tom Thompson

Over the years The Mind-Tickler has written about many grand consciousness-raising topics.

Under guise of seeming lightness, we have considered awareness, enlightenment, vastness, self, no-self, thought, mind, suffering, free will, choice, and happiness. We've examined the nature of reality, and whether there even is such a thing.

We have quoted philosophers, mathematicians, neuroscientists, and physicists.

If that isn't grand and serious business, I don't know what is.

Mixed in with all of that importance have been many Mind-Ticklers covering the not-in-the-least grand. Perhaps even the downright ridiculous.

As in, y'know, the human.

The What-the-Hells of everyday life. The money and health worries, mistakes, failures, lack of motivations, shames, politics. The social media block buttons, laundry and housekeeping dust bunnies.

Yep. Not grand.

Why does The Mind-Tickler bother with such untranscendent nonsense? Why even talk about the mundane tribulations of the false self?

I mean, it's not real anyway.

Shouldn't we stick to loftier discussions where enlightenment might happen, and human messes no longer apply?

Let's face it, lots of good folks reading The Mind-Tickler hope that some right words will catapult them into the vastness of enlightenment, thereby making human ego - the convoluted, angry, scared, sad, regret-filled, human ego-

go *poof*.

Never mind that it's ego itself which supposedly wants to make itself go *poof*.

Claiming it really really wants… its own extinction.

And also managing not to notice that said poof has happened to exactly no one through all of known history.

Ramana was still Ramana. Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta- not one was a poofed, unrecognizable, egoless person. Not one transcended their personhood.

Well, that's inconvenient.

Still, lots of folks hope to make what they understand is a fictitious character, die or disappear anyway.

Ego-death seems desirable.

Though, what would be left if they were successful and ego did finally *poof* into nothingness?

Well, that would be - nothing. *Nothing* is what would be left.

Because the person, the illusion- this is where humans live.

Love, joy, bliss, tears, fury, terror–everything is experienced via the character.

Without the ego as fulcrum through which experience happens, there's nothing.

Don't take my word for it. Try experiencing anything, hearing anything, feeling anything, knowing enlightenment is happening, without the illusion of you.

The illusion of you is where everything known is experienced.

That includes enlightenment. That includes awareness of awareness.

In fact, "attaining enlightenment" specifically requires us to *NOT* go *poof*.

Because existence requires… existence.

Not non-existence.

Luckily for us ego-types though, the character is where the fun is. The character is what experiences the scary movies, the roller coasters, the tear-filled novellas, ballgames, artistry, chocolate, sex.

Self is where the juice is.

It may be a dream, a stage, a play. It may be a story.

But it's fascinating. And we adore story.

In fact, remove story and what's left is heavy, dull, dry, uninteresting. What's left is weighty.

Which is the exact opposite of the blissful transcendence supposedly desired by poof-seekers.

So yes, The Mind-Tickler sometimes turns to everyday tribulations, dramas and pains of the non-existent self.

Why not? It's fun. And as it happens, all of that is included in consciousness too.

So while till now, disappearing the ego somehow may have seemed like an answer,

since it hasn't worked so far, maybe we can try something different.

Maybe we can consider enjoying the hell out of ego's weird and wacky experiences, pleasant or not- rather than continually attempting to escape this human business.

Because Krishnamurti liked Clint Eastwood movies and luxury and cigarettes. Alan Watts liked drugs. Ramana liked his cow and his mountain and his rice cooked just so.

None of them transcended personality.

Escaping ego is not an option.

So we may as well make friends with it.

As is.

And ironically that ego, and the mundane, and the disapproved-of, and the everyday trivialities-

just might be where freedom has lived all along,

Anyway.

Besides, this ego-bound life business will be over soon enough.

No sense rushing that.

"I am so appreciative that the insights that come my way do not turn me into an emotionless thing with no personality. I enjoy all the facets of being a so-called 'person' even though I know it is just a play of the elements. The ups and downs. The crazy intellectual mind games. The spiritual types, so careful with their catch phrases and jargon. I would trade all the spiritual nonsense for two french hens any day of the week... Enjoy. Life is the great teacher."

~Gilbert Schultz

Questioner: "When people see any personality quirk, they feel there cannot be liberation, as the person doesn't appear to be perfect."

Tony Parsons: "Yes, its gorgeous stuff isn't it? The mind will find any way it can to get out of this." (Laughter)

~Tony Parsons

FEARFUL SELF

June 1, 2021

"I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

~T.S. Elliot

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

Many years ago I was the lead presenter in a business situation. I did the hours-long thing, helped some folks, answered some questions. It went great. I wore my lucky suit. I was confidant, in command, capable.

Afterwards, I watched the video.

Wait, what was my face doing?

I looked afraid. For the entire recording.

That couldn't be right. I wasn't afraid! Well, not after the initial adrenaline nerves. Not once I got going.

But the darn face betrayed something else.

Oh no. Couldn't I go back in time, get better control of my face and self, and pretend that video away?

Well since TikTok and YouTube weren't invented yet, no.

Ever notice how much everyday, low-level fear humans drag around?

Constantly running in the background. An imperceptible hum. Familiar.

We're used to it.

I'm not talking about the loud tonsil-showing screaming that happens when the fear-dial is ramped up to high. *That*, we do notice. *That* we name: nervousness, anxiety, terror, panic attack. We pay l*ots* of attention to*that*.

No I'm talking about thousands of tiny daily micro-fears. Teeny unacknowledged jolts of "Ack!"

Every day. All day. Even asleep, in dreams.

We're afraid of phone calls. Answering the front door. Rips in pants, bugs, losing a game. Being awkward. Bad posture. Spinach in the teeth. Zeros. An untied shoelace. Looking old. Being old.

We're afraid our smoking will lead to early death, that heartburn is really a heart attack, we're ugly, people are laughing at us. We're afraid our yelling is messing up the kids, we said something stupid at the party, we blew the recital.

We're afraid of not sleeping enough, sleeping too much, the dark, being wrong, reading the news.

We're afraid of rain, empty streets, wasting our life, dying without getting enlightened, not knowing something, being late, forgetting a word, making the spouse angry.

I could go on and on.

So could you.

It begins to be clear that these human things are inherently afraid. All the time. Of absolutely everything.

But what for? There are no tigers around.

Could it be because the variable, contradictory, unprovable thing called "my self" is afraid that it … isn't?

If that's true then, by golly, effort to keep that hidden must never let up.

Which is also scary. Because who the hell knows how to do that?

We do try though.

Mostly by trying to overcome all those little fears.

With procrastination, meditation, therapy, inquiry, retreats, positive affirmations, exercise, and spirituality. With pot, alcohol, sex, shopping, and chips.

Never-mind that none of that actually succeeds at stopping daily micro-fears from continuing.

Because when fear is at the absolute core, the very center, of being a separate self,

well, that's not overcome-able.

And certainly not by the separate self.

After all, that would be self defeating.

So at least maybe there can be some relief in seeing that anything that's not-there, anything that's nothing, actually has no need of protection or safety anyway.

Y'know, being illusion and all.

Whew. Nothing's starting to look pretty good.

Maybe even better than answering the phone.

Ok but if we can't eliminate fears, then what do we do with them?

Well, we live with them.

Like ‘em or not.

We live with the face-betraying unease, the worry about weather, the heartbeat that happens with the doorbell.

Because low-level or high, some degree of fear comes with the human package. It is built in. It is not going anywhere.

Luckily, it's just fear.

It's just fear of fear.

It's just the self, afraid of being caught, being seen, as the wispy delusion it is.

No big deal.

It's nothing.

We're nothing.

Tigers can't eat that.

Which is an absolute and true safety.

And there's nothing scary there

at all.

"Ram Tzu knows this. . .
The fear never leaves you.

It is part of you
As tied to your center as your breath.

Touch it,
Stroke it
Get to know it well.
As long as you are
It will be with you.

You scream
You shout
You rage
You want quit of it.
You push it away with all your strength.

But hear this. . .

It thrives on all the exercise
You give it.
It gets stronger when
You give it something to push up against.

Left alone it will wither and die.

But you know you can not leave it alone.
You must always fight the fear.
It is your nature to always fight.

Yet sometimes there is Grace . . .
You disappear into it
And there is no longer a battle.

The warrior is gone. "

~Wayne Liquorman aka Ram Tzu

AUTHENTIC YOU

June 8, 2021

"Someone who's fake is someone who acts one way around their family and their close friends, but once they get out in the public, they're this whole different person."

~Danielle Bregoli

"Do you know that the word 'person' means 'mask'? The 'persona' is the mask worn by actors in Greco-Roman drama.... So How to be a real person equals How to be a genuine fake."

~Alan Watts

Who are you? The Real You, I mean.

Gosh how does anyone begin to answer that question? Because really, how would anyone know?

I mean, the question can't be answered without the word "sometimes," or without situational context.

That Real You thing is so dang changeable.

For instance, you're smart. Well, when you're not being dumb. Adorable, when not a pain in the butt. Angry sometimes. Kind sometimes. Loving

sometimes. Social sometimes. Honest, upfront and direct. Except when you're not.

For every description of the self there are many other, contradictory descriptions. All equally true.

The Real You appears to be less of a real thing, and more of a Blow-In-The-Wind thing.

Perhaps making its realness debatable.

Still, plenty of spiritual and self-improvement gurus tell us to be authentic and true to what we are. We're told it's critically important to our well-being and our ability to live with ourselves.

And certainly we believe. Courses, retreats and books about how to be authentic are big business.

So it might be nice to know what "authenticity" means. Since it's a health requirement and all.

Does it mean we're supposed to state, out loud and up front, whatever thoughts and feelings are happening to us in every moment?

Cry when we're sad, yell when we're angry, finger-point, judge, criticize, or disapprove, out loud when that's what's "true for us?" ("*Hey sorry you don't like it- I'm just being real.*")

Without editing? Without any judicious keeping things to ourselves?

Imagine if everyone did that.

There aren't enough ear plugs, frankly.

It's also hard to imagine that reality or existence has any need to see 8 billion humans "express" themselves authentically.

Isn't it weird that the self requires an outward display, particularly of inner thoughts and feelings, in order to be "true?"

That's a funny kind of truth.

Since it requires a show.

Besides, even if being a legit self that puts itself out there at all times was desirable, would it even be possible to express every thought and feeling?

There are so many; they are so fast.

So every thought and feeling can not be expressed.

That means then, by necessity, that there's editing going on.

We're presenting an edited version of ourselves to the world.

That is display. Presentation.

That's not real, that's a *representation* of real.

So even when we're absolutely convinced we're acting true to ourselves…

We're still *acting*. Simulating. Pretending.

None of which is authentic.

Now right about here, you may be saying, "*Oh please, I know I'm authentic by how I feel*."

Which really means, "*Sometimes I have a feeling I like better than another, and I name that feeling, "authenticity*."

As if liking a feeling makes anything literally, legitimately, true.

As if thoughts, busily sorting experience into Real and Not Real, actually create truth, simply because they show up.

"*This, not that, is the real me. I know this. Because I think it. Because I feel it. I can tell*."

Though as all clever Mind-Tickler readers are aware, thoughts lie.

And no one can live up to an unedited, idealized version of how we are supposed to be, and actually be real.

Since ideal is fantasy. Fantasy is the opposite of authentic.

Plus, "living up to" is not in any way the same as "being."

We keep trying though.

Trying to *act like*, pretend *as if,* the personality, that Varies-With-the-Situation idea, is what we are.

Perhaps this is why "Fake it till you make it" is a thing.

And why imposter syndrome is so rampant.

Perhaps we feel false and like frauds, because we are false and like frauds.

And there is no one authentic anyone.

Because it's not possible to authentic-ate, legitimize, or confirm a wispy, variable, nowhere-to-actually-be-found, self.

No person is a true self.

We are all AC-TORES.

Thankfully, knowing this turns out to be freeing.

Since pretending to exist as something not real generally doesn't feel too great.

Thinking that the show is real-life is crazy-making.

Instead, it's far more authentic, more legit, and a calmer, clearer way to live,

to see that these selves are all

true imposters.

No matter how we feel or what the mind calls "real",

we are always genuine fakes.

So if we really do want be true to ourselves,

we can start by authenticating

that true inauthenticity.

"Although we pretend, we really shouldn't forget that we are pretending, that we are making up the content of our experience; we are making up the little dramas of our lives. We collude in this ridiculous charade of an illusion pretending that it's real, only to reveal that it's not."

~Adyashanti

"What you are basically, deep deep down, far in, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. And you're ALL that, only you're pretending you're not."

~Alan Watts

PERSONAL YOU

June 15, 2021

"Accept your lot and make your mother happy. Run fast and make your god happy."

~Ancient Sumerian text, approx. 3000 BC

"There are no new thoughts."

~Byron Katie

You think it's just you.

Or perhaps you have it worse than others, and your situation is especially bad.

Or maybe you grant that others do also suffer the same unfortunate afflictions in life, so you bond with them in solidarity against those normal different others who don't suffer this way.

That's when you join the autism group, the anxiety group, the positive-thinking mailing list. That's when you try the dating sites, sign up for podcasts about getting motivated, log in every night to the, "I'm enlightened and you're not" groups.

You may think your issues are particular to you. But sit in my chair for a day or two and you start to notice that everyone says the same things. About

the same kinds of troubles.

In fact, it's always the same handful of topics people end up discussing- self doubt/self improvement, success/achievement/productivity, love/relationships/others, health/death, addictions/cravings, and enlightenment/how to live life best.

All the usual stuff, showing up as feelings, goals, desires, shoulds, shouldn'ts, likes and dislikes.

Turns out that when thoughts revolve around a recurrent set of limited topics, humans suffer.

All humans. Humans such as you.

Which is weird. I mean, you're unique, right?

Well, maybe your kind of suffering is a new phenomenon. Or maybe the current mass suffering of so many folks is a product of difficult current times, personal traumatic childhoods, the barrage of media and technology.

"*Life is suffering*." *–Buddha, approx. 625 BC*

Oh.

So apparently it's not new. Since Buddha lived about 2700 years ago.

In fact, dig back a little and it begins to be clear that people have been struggling with the exact same problems, saying the same exact stuff you say, about the same exact challenges,

For at least 8100 years. As far back as they've found written words.

Thoughts identical to the ones you're lugging around have literally been around at least 8000 years.

So at least you're in good company. *Old* company, but still.

That thought about not being productive, or good enough, or lovable? The one about whether you should have another beer, or what other people think, or whether you're ugly or healthy or safe from death? The thought about whether you meditate enough or have achieved enough enlightenment, if your parents did you wrong, or if life has been too hard or if feelings could be escaped by death?

Ancient. Thousands of years old.

Bringing that old spiritual maxim, "Thoughts aren't personal," to a whole new level.

Because thousands-of-years-old thoughts can not be about you.

Childhood traumas, or cravings for booze, or fear of disapproval, or anger at others' obviously wrong behaviors, can't be about you or your life if they were also about Gilgamesh the Sumerian's life in 3000 BC.

Thoughts like, "*I can't bear this feeling, maybe I should die*," or, "*I'm not reaching full potential, I'm failing at life, love, enlightenment,*" *c*an't have anything to do with you, if they were Shakespeare's lines for Hamlet in 1595, or in Aeschylus' scripts in approx. 500 BC.

"*It would be better to die once and for all than to suffer pain for all one's life*." —*Aeschylus, 500 BC*

"*Nobody lives the life he chooses to live*." —*Menander, 4th cent. BC*

Hmmmm. Seems you're very very late to the, "It's all me and mine," party.

It becomes clear that suffering has a script. Being human has a script.

A script which is not particular to any one person's life situations. A script which carries on over centuries, independent of any life's particular circumstances and feelings.

With words like, "*My thoughts*"and "*My inner voice,*"you have claimed authorship to what is not yours.

Fine. Who cares? How does it matter?

Well, it doesn't. Unless you like sanity.

Unless you'd like freedom from a lifetime of hating yourself, fixing, "going inward," striving and never attaining.

Because once it's seen that all thought is ancient and repetitive and scripted,

there's no way to continue thinking it's you in particular with the problem.

There's no way to continue thinking suffering is about *your* trauma or *your*cheating spouse or *your*inherent lack of value.

It starts to be clear that it's just your turn to read the ancient lines.

Taking the you right out of it.

"*Humans are born, they live, then they die, this is the order that the gods have decreed. But until the end comes, enjoy your life, spend it in happiness, not despair. Savor your food, make each of your days a delight, bathe and anoint yourself, wear bright clothes that are sparkling clean, let music and dancing fill your house, love the child who holds you by the hand, and give your wife pleasure in your embrace. That is the best way for a man to live.*"

— The Epic of Gilgamesh, 3400 BC

This is good news.

Because separate self-sense hurts, unique person-ness hurts, laying claim to what isn't yours, hurts.

Because it's a lie.

When instead, you are a swept-along part of an ancient, common, universal,

so much bigger,

so much older,

than any one person's

non-personal experience.

And that's a script that just might

stick around awhile.

"Hey, let's put on a play in the barn!"

~Scriptwriters for Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland

MAKE IT STAY

June 29, 2021

"If you try to capture running water in a bucket, you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket the water does not run. To "have" running water you must let go of it and let it run. The same is true of life."

~Alan Watts

"Already your mind's saying, "Yes, but come on ... what about the levels of enlightenment and what about my emotional blocks, and what about my chakras, they're not all fully open? What about my stillness – I'm not really still yet, and what about my ego? It's a bit reduced but it's still there."

~Tony Parsons

Hopeful client: *I am no longer seeking. I see that this is it. I just need your help seeing this from different angles so that my mind doesn't take me away from present reality again and pull me back into thinking.*

Most spiritually-inclined folks are pretty certain there's something to get. and then, once gotten, it has to be held onto.

A person can get there and then, can/should/must stay there.

Of course anyone can be forgiven for thinking any of that, especially since it seems to be the message from so many teachers, memes, and opinionated online posts.

Interestingly though, there's a common experience many people describe when they have a "holy crap" spiritual-type event.

Quite often they describe a sense of sliding, a feeling of scrambling on vertical glass, of no gripper and also no grip.

For a moment it is clear that there's nothing to hold onto.

And then almost instantly, all these same folks want to do is hold on to that realization, that understanding.

Permanently. As in, forever.

They want to grip the ungrippable. They want to never let it go.

"Whoo hoo I got it! This is it! Now how do I keep it?"

Oh the pain of contradiction, dissatisfaction, and perpetual seeking inherent in this particular confusion.

Because asking any version of, "How do I stay here?" such as, *How do I keep thought from grabbing me again? Or, How do I keep my awareness of awareness? Or, How do I keep this bliss, this "not minding what happens" state?*

is a hopeless, failure-guaranteed goal.

First, because here on planet earth, nothing stays.

Weather changes minute by minute, rivers change direction, earth's axis and magnetic poles shift. Creatures are alive and then dead. Skin cells, hair, athletic ability, ideas, thoughts, moods, feelings- all come and go, all here then gone.

Why would we think some spiritual understanding, or a grasp of awareness, or some clarity of thought, is supposed to be the exception to that very clear Earth-rule?

How is it reasonable to think we're supposed to grasp something and keep it grasped forever?

Especially when our alive-human biology makes "holding onto" anything, even awareness, flat-out impossible.

Because it's the brain which enables us to experience anything, including awareness.

Humans can't do a single thing without the brain. That would be called "vegetative state."

Without the brain, we can't think, we can't feel, we can't meditate or zone out, we can't experience bliss or consciousness, and we can't "attain enlightenment".

It is not possible to be alive and transcend the brain.

Which means humans are always limited by its capabilities.

Which means the grand spiritual experience so many folks are chasing happens within the limits of the small piece of meat in our heads.

And as it happens, that meat, developed after many millions of years of evolution and species survival, does not do sameness. That meat looks for and requires difference, it requires change, it requires movement. (*There's tons and tons of science on this.)*

The brain sees a clear blue sky and instantly turns attention to the one cloud or the one bird or the one plane moving within all that clear empty space.

If nothing happens to be moving or appearing in the clear sky, then its attention simply wanders elsewhere.

The brain can't stay focused on emptiness for more than a second or two.

It literally cannot.

So good luck to any seeker trying to make nothingness, or sameness, or some dearly-loved experience, stay forever.

Besides, trying to regain or attain or hold onto that sliding nothingness actually makes the sense of self, the one to whom this is happening, more solid, not less. More something, not nothing.

So finally we might get that chance to experience that long-awaited, long-desired moment of nothingness and then boom, the mind promptly obliterates that emptiness by placing the *ME* squarely in the center of it.

Bye-bye, scrambling moment of not-there.

Of course, none of this is to say that the sense of something bigger, the sense of a consciousness which is always there, comes and goes.

Consciousness may indeed be here always. It may indeed be the one thing that stays.

And we may even sense this, or feel it, or somehow be absolutely convinced we know this.

And it may feel like consciousness is ever-present.

But "feels like" is not "knowing."

And let's get honest, *we do not know*.And never will.

Because true knowing also happens within the limited brain.

What we do know though, is that no one in human history has stayed in that highly-desired awareness of awareness, permanently.

No one. Not even Ramana. Or Krishnamurti, or Nisargadatta.

Seeing this can be a great relief.

Because chasing permanence of any kind is nothing but frustrating.

And wouldn't it be lovely to grasp or not grasp, get and then lose, hold and then let go,

Without rules or impossible demands for anything else.

Perhaps this is the true This Is It.

Perhaps this is something worth grasping,

and worth holding onto,

Even if only for a moment.

"We don't wake up forever. We wake up only now. People have these wonderful experiences of spiritual opening, and that's not it. As soon as they think, "I want this to last forever," they've moved in to a future and lost the reality. This is it, right now. It's that simple. Only this exists."

~Byron Katie

"Why would you want to keep the heart captive, like an unopened bottle of wine?"

~Hafiz

BACK TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

July 6, 2021

"We are lutes, no more no less. If the soundbox is stuffed full of anything, no music."

~Rumi (partial)

"I'll tell you what hermits realize. If you go off into a far, far forest and get very quiet, you'll come to understand that you're connected with everything."

~Alan Watts

We call it "getting back to normal". And oh yeah we want it.

We're mighty tired of covid limitations and we want what is called "freedom" ASAP.

After all, normal life is busy, active, productive. Normal life is connection with other humans, and social activity, and love.

Normal is full.

We adore full. We cannot wait to be full again.

Which perhaps is why, as covid restrictions lift, people are in a hurry to visit, party, travel, consume. Give us restaurants, bars, airplanes, shopping,

festivals and lots and lots of hugs.

We shall resume where we left off, and "make up for lost time."

As if that's possible.

We're trying though, aiming for extra full – with extra peopling and extra indulgence. Binging and overeating, over drinking, over spending. Oh yeah.

We also want to get back to normal life as if nothing had interrupted. As if covid restrictions had never forced us to abandon how things were, with a sudden grinding halt.

Which is kind of odd. I mean, what's to gain by trying to pretend this last year-plus never happened? Is it really necessary to undo that year, and as fast as possible?

It seems so, as the push for normalcy is strong and urgent and everywhere. Everyone knows getting back to former lives feels healthy, right, and necessary.

And certainly not many are saying, "I liked the downtime, I'm staying alone, isolated and not productive just like this, indefinitely."

C'mon, we all know that's not normal. So stop lazing around and get out there! Do something. Fill ‘er up.

Although, it's not particularly "free" when it's a requirement, an obligation, is it.

But never mind that. Because what we got in Covid-time, and what we'd would rather not ever have again thank you very much, was *nothing*.

Nothingness and lack and deprivation and missing out.

And far too much empty. Empty time, empty homes, empty streets, empty buildings, empty arms.

Empty is bad. Empty is unhealthy, lonely, damaged and wrong.

Humans are not fans of empty.

Anyone choosing that on purpose is in need of fixing, inquiry and help.

Full is better. Out is better. Together is better.

So it's odd that many are finding it uncomfortable to come back out and resume those old lives.

Lipstick, shoes, pants, small talk, smiling at others, sharing elevators- things can feel strange.

Partly because during lockdown, newly developed odd quirks, like maybe throwing laundry into drawers unfolded, were unseen.

And now, back in real life, people will see the wrinkles.

Oh look, the public face and pretender, the presentation and persona, returns from its year in exile.

Bringing with it the hider, the secret-keeper, of all those weird behaviors we've always sort-of had but allowed more fully while alone in our homes for so long.

How have we not noticed that socializing comes with more secretiveness, more self consciousness, more comparing?

"Did I say the wrong thing? Did they like me? Can they tell I am afraid? Can they tell I am weird? Was I awkward? Am I ok? Am I good enough?"

Returning to normal life means returning to more intense self watching, improving, and evaluating how we're doing.

Oh good, an evaluation of the self, performed *by* the self. Always a good time.

Of course it's not as if this self consciousness didn't go on in lockdown too, whether we were with other folks or alone.

I mean, even in lockdown we harangued ourselves to write that book, learn to cook, take up yoga. If we weren't going to have a raucous good time with others, we should have at least cleaned a closet.

It's just that when we're in others' company, self judgment intensifies considerably.

Are we really in such a hurry to resume that? It may not necessarily be as fun as we expect.

Not to mention that the sense of being empty and not enough can often show up even when we have filled-up on all the normal socializing and eating and drinking.

So instead of trying so hard to stuff ourselves full of activities and love and enoughnesses,

which may not get us what we want anyway,

maybe we could notice that there's something to be said for aloneness, empty time and checking less frequently on the self's performance.

Y'know, those experiences we've been so eager to avoid.

Because in lockdown or not, the human can't help trying to "make something" of itself.

Which is tricky stuff. Because how do you make something out of nothing?

And are we so sure we are even capable, that it is even possible, that we are the ones whose job it is to "make something" of time, of life, of existence, of our self?

The obligation for that kind of making, of producing, is a heavy burden.

Which is why there may be value in noticing the many advantages of covid empty time, of empty arms, of empty rooms and streets.

And why that sudden enforced *lack* that we're so sure happened with lockdown may actually have contained an astonishing gift we're not likely to be blessed with ever again.

An opportunity that normal, busy public life rarely allows us to receive.

So maybe we don't have to run away quite so hard from lockdown and isolation and emptiness and not-normal.

Maybe we don't have to try quite so hard to regain what we think we lost.

Because that resumed normal life just might turn out to be

the actual

missing out.

"That beaten track will lead you nowhere. There is no oasis situated yonder; you are stuck with the mirage."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"If God said,
'Rumi, pay homage to everything
that has helped you enter my arms,'
there would not be one experience of my life,
not one thought, not one feeling,
not any act,
I would not
bow to."

~Rumi

FINDING YOUR OWN

July 13, 2021

YOUR ANGRY SELF

July 20, 2021

D: "Today morning, I got angry."
Ramana: "Anger is of mind. You are not the mind."

~Ramana Maharshi

"We think that there's something fundamentally black about our nature, that something monstrous will emerge if we let go. If we see through it all, what will become of us? It's scary. Everything in the end is a defense against nothingness."

~Adyashanti

My friend is angry all the time. He's angry at coworkers, angry at restaurant seaters, angry at drivers, and spiritual leaders. He's angry at politics, prices, his girlfriend, and his own lack of enlightenment.

His anger makes others uncomfortable. People actually congratulate him when he keeps his fury lowkey.

Because anger is bad, n'kay? It's unevolved, out of control.

We're supposed to be nice, dammit. Polite, loving, kind. At all times.

So the requirement is to keep any pique under wraps. If we speak up we're supposed to do it measuredly, keeping our voice level. We can say we're

angry but not scream.

Though of course we do scream.

Because in a world where we're supposed to have control over ourselves and all situations, we turn out to be dishearteningly powerless. Whether it's traffic or not being respected or not getting what we want or our moods,

our powerlessness shows. An inflamed temper is just more of it.

And then, enter guilt, regret, shame and self hatred. Enter addictions and the sudden compulsion to punish with too many chips or drink. As if we deserve the added self hate that comes after rage indulgence, too.

As if to punish the self for doing a poor job of presentation.

Because it turns out anger always seems to mean something about the me, and its flaws, its helplessness, its wrongness. Anger confirms every bad story of who we think we are. It says, "Here I am - the difficult one, the problem, the hard to handle, the flawed, mean, unkind, crazy."

And also, simultaneously, "Here I am- the one who's not going to take this. Here I am, standing up for my self."

Defending the self. Protecting the self.

Although from what exactly? And what kind of self needs this much protection?

Well, every kind of self.

Every kind of self spends most of its time proving, "Here I am."

And anger proves the me.

There's *I AM* in it.

Along with a ton of fear that *I AM NOT*.

Because every self is terrified to be nothing.

And then here comes some situation that threatens to reveal that nothingness.

GRRRR! It shows up as anger.

Anger is disguised fear.

Fear of powerlessness and lack of control. Fear that we don't matter, fear that we're missing out, fear that we're bad. Fear of disappearing via death.

Fear of not existing at all.

Oh lord, Mind-Tickler, that again? Does it always keep coming down to that?

Well, as Adya said above, "*Everything in the end is a defense against nothingness*."

But c'mon now Mind-tickler, so what? We can't run around screaming, slashing and burning just because we're allowing the self to protect its story, right? We live in a world where there are consequences to expressing rage without management.

This is where a lot of folks get confused. Because experiencing anger is not the same as expressing anger. Perhaps we could consider just letting it be there without much fanfare, without expressing or punishing.

Just another experience happening.

Besides, it's not like, if we understand that anger is fear, or if we understand that the self tries to hide its nonexistence, there will be no more anger ever again.

That is not going to happen. Even Ramana got angry sometimes.

The self is always going to be afraid of exposure, and is always going to protect against that with noise and bluster and distraction posing as

emotion.

And it's not even about whether it's ok to be angry. We are angry. Who are we to say that's not ok?

It's possible though, that sometimes a certain amount of fury may just fall away on its own, taking a bunch of addictive behavior with it.

Not because any of that is bad.

But because sometimes it becomes clear that nothing does not need protection.

Nothing is in no danger.

Nothing is fine as it is.

Just a whole lot of nothing pretending to be something.

Leaving nothing to be ticked off

At anything.

"...rage is triggered when anyone restrains you.
In each moment the fire rages, it will burn away a hundred veils.
And carry you a thousand steps toward your goal."

~Rumi

"As long as we believe that we're our bodies, we don't have to know that we are infinite, our cells without limit, like music itself, free."

~Byron Katie

"What is your life about, anyway?
Nothing but a struggle to be someone.
Nothing but a running from your own silence."

~Rumi

FIND YOUR SELF

July 27, 2021

"There is no self to take refuge in. The man who carries a parcel is anxious not to lose it -- he is parcel-conscious."

~Nisargadatta

"A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

~David Bohm

"Being is the consummate absence."

~Tony Parsons

There is no self. You do not exist.

Yep. Literally.

Whatttt?

Oh the arguments and disdain, mockery, anger. Damn that Buddha with his nonsensical no-self business. Damn Tony Parsons. And Nisargadatta. And both Krishnamurtis. Damn all those others too, including yours truly.

I mean, what in the actual hell are they talking about? You're right here, for crying out loud. *RIGHT HERE*(air-stabs finger in body's general direction.) Y'know, whose arthritis is this, and what if I step in front of a bus, and etc etc etc.

Are all those teacher-folks just stupid, or bald-faced liars? Or could you be missing something?

Or maybe there's no outrage, and only despair, as you've struggled for years trying hard to comprehend the incomprehensible.

Sitting cross-legged ruminating about I AM, depending on the Self to meditate on its own non-existence.

Either way it's gibberish. Try as you might, you don't see it.

Do you *need*to see it? Of course not. Nothing needs that.

But you want to. And my inbox is once again full of the No-Self question.

Despite 6 previous Mind-Ticklers dealing with this subject head-on, and countless Ticklers indirectly addressing the nonexistent self.

So though we've written about this many times before, the subject is still of great interest, and apparently becoming an annual Tickle.

So let's re-look at what might be standing in the way of seeing that you don't exist.

Mostly what gets in the way are basic certainties, certainties so completely assumed that it never occurs to you to question them.

Which is why we're about to get literal again.

Also let's set aside "seems likes" and "feels likes". You want to find what is *actually*real, not just what "feels" real. "Seems like" and "feels like" are metaphors. Metaphors aren't reality; they're similar-to's and examples-of.

Yet notice how often you have to resort to them to deal with this baffling question.

OK. Let's start with reality.

You are absolutely certain there is one.

And ideas like thoughts, ego and mind? Real. That bus you'll step out in front of? Real. Arthritis? Death? Real and real. Duh and duh.

You're certain.

And of course when it comes to a *me,* you're absolutely certain of that too. There you are, in the mirror. There are the emotions and body aches, there are the thoughts, the socks, the chair, trees, other people.

You can see ‘em. You can feel ‘em.

Notice how much of that certainty about reality depends on "personal experience."

Meaning, a person. Meaning, you.

What you think, what you feel, what you see and hear.

Things happen to this you. *You*are the one seeing and feeling.

Notice how much of your you-ness is body based.

Feelings, colors, sounds, senses- come from and point back to the body.

Take the body out of it and where does the self go?

Remove the body as the center of all things, and…

there is no center.

"*But there's still a sense of me*."

*Where?*Literally, specifically, where?

(Points towards body.) Ah. Are we back to the body- chest, head- to prove your existence?

And what animates this body, what gives life to it, what knows what it feels?

Is that physical?

And then notice all the geography words, the placement words, the location words.

"*I'm right here*."

Body gives you a physical place.

We have found you. You are located.

As opposed to decentralized. As opposed to located nowhere.

As opposed to *BEING*the happenings themselves.

Because what if what you are is experience- every sensation, color, thought, rather than the experienc*ER?*

"*I am this feeling. I am this thought. And that one and that one. I am this sound, this color, this sensation*."

Literally.

Then there is nothing to point to,

there's no one to do the pointing, and

you are

everything you'd ever hoped you could be.

Everything.

Literally.

"What you are basically, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. And you're ALL that, only you're pretending you're not."

~Alan Watts

"Listen: this world is the lunatic's sphere,
Don't always agree it's real,
Even with my feet upon it
And the postman knowing my door
My address is somewhere else."

~Hafiz

THE DREAM LIFE

August 3, 2021

"Last night I had a flying dream, and it was so real I had a hard time remembering I couldn't fly when I woke up."

~Jed McKenna

"We all suspend disbelief all the time. Somewhere inside you know that your fast food lunch is more noxious than nutritious. You might as well spread lard on a pack of cigarettes and eat that, but you eat it anyway because, seriously, it's not just lunch that's so damn crazy, it's everything. Where do you draw the line?"

~Jed McKenna

"It's a dream, questioning itself."

~Darryl Bailey

CJ has a nightmare. She thinks it means something.

Something important.

She wants to know what the hidden message is. If only she can get a hold of it.

Because everyone knows dreams are personal. They mean something.

About the me.

Naturally.

And everyone knows that our lives and our obviously necessary understandings about the self can be transformed by decrypting the messages hidden within dreams.

We just need to figure out the secret code.

Much like Q-anon searching for signs of secret meaning in a sentence by putting together every fourth letter so as to make a new sentence. Or like reading tea leaves, or a jigsaw puzzle.

And so many symbols! Representations, illustrations, examples of…

well, something else.

Dream water symbolizes emotions that run deep. Or a threat to drown us. Or life, death, change, or rebirth.

Whichever.

Dream teeth symbolize sexual repression (because what else could teeth mean,) or the desire to be nurtured, or a big moment of transition. (*All interpretations shown, courtesy of Google)*

Pick one. Hell, pick ‘em all.

The thing is, what needs all these symbols? You'd think if mind has something to say, it would just say it rather than drizzle out all these obscure little hints. What's the big secret, the scavenger hunt, the hidden code?

What sends these special signs, and why can't it speak plainly and directly, if it's got something to point out? If it wants to communicate something, why not just say it?

Conveniently we never know if our guess, our reading of the tea leaves, is correct.

Since clearly we can make anything mean something.

We just need the proper decoder ring.

Oh well, at least the need for imposing order on haphazard chaos gets satisfied.

And yet... what makes us so absolutely positive that dreams are personal at all?

What has us so spellbound that no one considers that everyone might see the exact same things in dreams, or that billions worldwide may have all had similar dreams night after night, for thousands of years?

What makes them *ours?*

And what requires us to assign meaning about the self, of all things, to a dream?

And then we wake up and go on about our day.

Though once our eyes are open, it's not as if anything is different.

We commence doing the exact same assignment of meaning to random images and occurrences in the daytime, that we do when asleep at night.

We see a mental image, or a tree, or a body, and think- *that image happening in my personal eyeballs- it means something*.

"This action means I am unkind. This number means I have failed. That facial expression means I am unloved."

Arbitrarily attaching meanings and causes to random happenings.

We think it, see it, it feels real, so that means it is real.

Awake, asleep- same.

And just like in nighttime fabrications, in the daytime we're caught up, believing, and completely *in* it.

In the dream.

Though of course we don't realize.

Because we're part of the dream.

*In*the illusion, part of the mirage, composed of fantasy.

Not the one dreaming.

So we can't tell what's real.

Because dream characters can't do that.

Which is why all we can do, just for fun,

since we love codes and symbols,

is imagine playing with this same life if it was somehow possible to know, *This is a dream*.

Imagine playing with, *What if I'm a dream*. Imagine playing with, *What if this isn't real*.

Despite absolute certainty about bodies, chairs, meanings, motivations, or causes.

Despite absolute certainty that it can ever be known what's real or isn't,

from *inside* the dream.

Just playing with what-ifs.

Watching what that might bring.

Nothing real to lose.

And who knows, that might just be

absolutely

eye opening.

"This place is a dream.
Only a sleeper considers it real.
Then death comes like dawn,
and you wake up laughing
at what you thought was your grief."

~Rumi

"Suddenly, I awoke
Now, I wonder who I am
A man who dreamed he was a butterfly,
or a butterfly dreaming it is a man."

~Chuang Tzu

ADDICTED

August 10, 2021

"If I knew I was consciousness I wouldn't want wine."

~Client

"I hear in many places that when the truth of my own nature is seen, there's no ‘me' left – therefore no ‘me' to quit smoking!"

~Anonymous

"All who make idols are nothing."

~Isaiah 44:9

I once worked with someone who specialized in helping people with addictions. This person's own drug addiction had fallen away, and it appeared from the outside they had beaten cravings in general, enough to attempt to help others do the same.

Meanwhile they were stealth-cruising public parks for anonymous sex at every possible opportunity.

Their addictions lived on.

Along with secrecy, fear of consequences, shame, and self-hatred.

They weren't alone though. Pretty much every human individual is addicted to something, and often to many somethings.

And like my former colleague, it may not be as obvious as pills or vodka; it can just as easily be sex, shopping, big feelings like fear or anger, or the hunt for enlightenment.

Most folks have their favorite theory about cause.

There's the "filling a void" theory, the "reaction to past trauma" theory, the "avoiding feelings" theory, the "neurological problem or chemical imbalance" theory. Or it's lack of presence, not mindful enough.

These theories can be combined, or mixed and matched.

Most don't call them theories though. Usually we are absolutely certain about our favorite explanation, often citing sources of well-credentialed other absolutely certain people.

You'd think with all that total certainty about addiction, that it ought to be easily stopped, fixed, and a thing of the past.

But no. Most addictions do not actually end.

Despite all the favorite cures or solutions too. Despite the therapy, inquiry, ayahuasca ,treatment centers, 12 steps, meditation, and the sitting with feelings. And let's not forget enlightenment, which is supposed to make flawed behaviors such as addiction simply vanish. *(For those hopeful true believers, let's be clear this is not true. On the contrary, addictions often get stronger. See Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, Watts, Mooji.)*

So isn't it funny that in our minds, we call compulsion a pleasure, a treat, reward, relief.

While at the same time busily trying very hard to stop said reward.

Bargaining with "Just one glass." Having the inevitable internal discussion about moderation rather than complete elimination. Landing eventually on all or nothing, and not being trusted to keep chips in the house.

One thing we're sure of. We're responsible. There's a whole lot of personal choice involved.

Ok, bad choice, but still.

This behavior must stop and it's up to us to stop it.

Hmm. The self is mighty powerful, no? Considering it can't prevent itself from opening a beer?

Look at us. We are The Doer!

Doing bad.

Bad us.

Misery follows. Guilt, failure, hopelessness.

That's some treat.

It turns out that somewhere along the way, "I deserve this pleasure" turns into, "This is all I deserve, this self hatred and heaviness which follows the indulgence."

Because despite what the mind tells us in the throws of a craving, addiction is not a reward.

It is a punishment.

For believing we are a person. A not-productive-enough person, a not-kind person, a failure-in-life-and-love person, a selfish or angry person.

A bad person.

Which is what persons are.

The self is inherently inadequate.

This is not ok.

Well, according to the self.

That's why almost everyone experiences addiction.

It confirms the sense of self, while giving mind a project.

Which is why quitting just may not be up to us.

Because despite what it says, no matter how convincingly, mind/thought/ego has no desire to change a thing.

And personal responsibility may not exist.

And weird as this may sound when we've all had lifetimes of indoctrination about our empowerment and ownership of consequences,

it could be that accepting our complete lack or power with regard to addiction,

sidesteps the mind trying to solve its own problems.

Because the mind's only way is to punish.

Not stop.

Meanwhile, taking the solutions out of our obviously powerless hands can lighten the sense of being a person at all.

Which, it turns out, is what so many seekers actually seek.

And may even provide the feeling, the happiness and peace, that we were hoping to find in the ice cream, the bottle, the new furniture, to begin with.

Powerlessness can be mighty sweet.

Non-personhood can be light.

We might even get high on it.

And who knows? That just might be

the ultimate treat.

"Admitted we were powerless."

~The Twelve Steps, Step #1

"God was full of Wine last night, so full of wine that He let a great secret slip.
He said: There is no man on earth who needs a pardon from Me-
For there is really no such thing, no such thing as sin!
That Beloved has gone completely wild . He has poured Himself into me!
I am blissful and drunk and overflowing.
Dear world, draw life from my sweet body,
Dear wayfaring souls, come drink your fill of liquid rubies,
For God has made my heart
An Eternal Fountain!"

~Hafiz

MOTIVATING YOUR FULL POTENTIAL

August 17, 2021

"Now, I write more and paint less. I try to hold off from doing too many things. I want to create vacancy in my life."

~Nicholas Wilton

"The feeling we have of betraying some mission we were mandated to fulfill, and being unable to fulfill it. And then coming to understand that the real mandate was to not fulfill it, and the deeper courage was to stand guiltless in the predicament in which you found yourself."

~Leonard Cohen

When I was young, every report card with my name on it said some version of, "Judy needs to be more motivated. She needs to work harder and apply herself, in order to reach her full potential."

Supposedly I had better in me.

Though exactly where it was hiding was unclear.

Still, the grownups seemed to agree that somewhere my greatness was waiting.

All it needed was the right behaviors from me - more homework and a better more well-behaved attitude towards my teachers and parents- to

unleash it.

Then I'd match their dream of what a child should be and do. Then I could be the max of whatever it is I was.

Fast forward to 4 or 5 decades later, and it's starting to look like there isn't better in me.

It looks like my full potential is never coming.

It looks like this unachieved potentiality is the best Judy that's ever going to be.

Hopefully I can get over it.

Along with all those others who, though grown up and living their lives, still suffer about not bringing the "best" of themselves.

Work, sports, arts, parenting, health, spirituality.

No matter what the area of life, we're indoctrinated into the myth of full potential.

OK is never good enough for us. We're far too special to settle for ordinary.

We have to be our best. We have to be the best.

Whatever that is.

Because really, what even is this full potential that we're supposed to strive for, for decades?

Is it a big house, a job title, a certain amount in the stock market? Is it a Pulitzer, an award, a medal? Is only the highest level of enlightenment acceptable?

And when, if ever, does potential finally become full and enough?

For instance, has Simone Biles achieved her Full Best? Surely there's more we can wring out of her.

It seems we never actually get there.

Or maybe there is no ‘there," and it's simply a matter of comparison.

Because "best" seems to be defined by what others do. If we surpass others, then we have achieved our best.

Meaning potential is graded on a curve, and is not actually a finite, end-goal thing in us.

It's in them. Our full potential depends on everyone else not reaching their best.

All that is needed is for everyone else not to achieve more than we do.

Yay!

And then, just to make this well-learned game even more fun,

when we don't leap off the couch eager to work work work towards some goal goal goal, to make ourselves better better better,

we and everybody else call us "unmotivated."

Yes, weirdly, oddly, we're unmotivated to work all our lives, even in areas that are supposed to be fun, for a mythological best or potential that doesn't exist.

Instead, aiming for potential is so exhausting, it makes a person need a nap.

The nagging becomes a weight so heavy that we can't get off the couch.

Circularly producing exactly the result we don't want. Perpetuating self-berating and self-hatred. Ensuring we're not enough and never will be.

Sure, leap out of bed with eagerness for that joy.

Meanwhile, how much perfectly good, perfectly adequate life is missed while we hound ourselves to be better?

And how do we not notice that, whether working, or in bed, or watching tv, or even staring at the ceiling drooling,

This right here is already, and has always been, the very best we can be.

As is.

We can't be more than we are.

We can't do more than we can.

Luckily, existence doesn't, and hasn't ever, needed a thing more from us.

Couch or boardroom- this is it.

Our best, fullest potential to be, to live, to exist- right here, already.

Not later. Now.

We might enjoy it.

Because this simply is

the best

there is.

"Maybe
Just maybe
Life unfolds
Relentlessly
With no holy plan
Maybe
It is sacred

Just as it is
Its power and innocence
Require no justification
Its perfection requires no meaning
Maybe nothing
Means anything
Other than what the Rose
Means
When it blooms
It means
Here I am
Here I am
Here I am."

~Senseless Perfection (partial) by Maya Luna

"It is a serious thing
just to be alive
on this fresh morning
in the broken world."

~Mary Oliver

FREEDOM!

August 24, 2021

"None are so hopelessly enslaved as those who falsely believe they're free."

~Goethe

There's a lot of talk about freedom these days.

Free will, free choice, free people, free society. Freedom regarding masks, vaccines, votes, schooling, body choices and leaving the house. Freedom to think and believe this or that opinion no matter how imaginary, or to revolt or follow along.

One thing's for sure: the right of individuals to be self-determining and self-ruled is a requirement. It's a right.

Freedom is obligatory.

Though of course if it's a requirement,

that's not free.

Still, we all need to be able to be me, right? We have to be able to be our individual selves, as we please.

Self insists on making the world, our way. Since as any spoiled toddler knows, our way is the way.

Turns out, getting what we want and only what we want- that's what is meant by "freedom."

Which perhaps is why Don't tell me what to do has become the rallying cry for rage, tears, fists and fears of the future.

Because humans are at the whim of our likes and preferences.

We are owned by them.

Making us actually, completely, un-free.

(Don't believe your friendly Mind-Tickler? Try to make yourself stop loving Trump and start loving Hillary, or vice versa. Go on; we'll wait.)

In fact, in what moment has any person, anywhere in the world, ever been free?

What individual has ever been free of some restraint, limitation, restriction?

From the instant any living thing is born, things are done to it and for it.

Humans are no exception, and are tied from the get-go to the deliverer's behaviors and to mom's preferences,

In a very unfree manner.

And throughout life, even if lucky enough to live mostly as we like, individuals are always still bound by, and dependent on, the rules of that society and family.

And on luck itself. And on gravity and air. And the body. And the true nature of humanness, and life, and existence.

Seems our idea of "freedom" is so wildly, blindly selective, ignoring the most basic restrictions on every individual life form, that it's pretty much delusional.

Still, humans do adore the notion of the individual having some power, some significance, some agency.

So we're all about honoring the self's wishes. We're all about insisting those wishes are important, that they matter, and that we matter.

Seems ideas about "Freedom" strengthen the sense of self as the center of the universe.

The point around which all rotates, with those all-important preferences.

Even though, if we look for that self, except for a vague "sense,"

and who knows what the hell that is,

it can't be found.

There's nothing to be found.

And nothing is not separate; it encompasses everything.

It's certainly is not individual.

So it has no need for freedom.

It seems we humans want to continue fighting for a freedom that doesn't exist, and a self that is nowhere,

just to be able to "feel like" something is real.

While meanwhile, being part-of, included-in, and done-to, anyway.

Could it be real freedom has less to do with getting everything just as the self wants, as in our way or the highway,

and more to do with no self at all?

Because there's so much more peace in accepting, rather than fruitlessly fighting for, the non-existence of something which can't be found.

And because like it or not, fight it or not, rage against it or not,

And regardless of any preferences,

existence is as it is.

As it is.

While the self is as it is not.

Which wonderfully, thankfully, ironically,

allows a freedom

to not be me.

Which may just be

the only freedom possible.

"Freedom does not mean getting to do whatever one wishes. Nor does freedom have anything to do with so-called ‘free will', which is a fantasy. Freedom arises with the understanding that in each moment what is, is, and cannot be different. The ‘myself' who chooses is a fiction, a story I have learned. In that admission one may find freedom — not the freedom to ‘choose', but the freedom to be."

~Robert Saltzman

"Let no one say the Tathagata cherishes the idea: I must liberate all living beings. Allow no such thought. Because in reality there are no living beings to be liberated by the Buddha. If there were living beings for the Buddha to liberate, He would partake in the idea of selfhood, personality, entity, and separate individuality.

Please close the door behind you as you leave."

~Diamond Sutra

BEING BEING

August 31, 2021

"When you actually see that you ARE the pain, pain ceases to be a motive, for there is no one to be moved."

~Alan Watts

"There are not two things there, there is not somebody who wants to be free from fear. That somebody who wants to be free from fear, IS the fear."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"There is no self apart from the perceiving. Perceiving is all there is."

~Adyashanti

I was talking this weekend with a lovely woman who lives a good responsible life, by the book, at all times within her God's rules. She read me a very long psalm from right there on her phone, trying earnestly to help me understand her world.

Feeling touched by her generosity, in return I gifted her with the information that we (she and I) don't exist. And not having a psalm, instead I offered her a way to see this for herself.

Yes indeedy.

That went over exactly as well as you might imagine.

Since my friend wasn't too excited about the gift I held out for her, I thought maybe you might want it.

Who knows, maybe you'll enjoy it better.

So start by thinking of a big emotion you don't like. Anger maybe, or sadness, despair, anxiety, jealousy, humiliation.

Something intense.

Got it? Ok, so here's the question:

That feeling… what if that's what you are?

Like, literally.

As in, "I am literally this feeling."

Not the one feeling it.

Not what's aware of it either.

What if what you are is the feeling itself?

Now usually, right about now, the mind diverts to figuring out if you agree.

Or pivots to brushing away the question with, "Yeah yeah I know this already."

Which is all fine; it just may keep you from receiving your gift.

So set that aside, because it doesn't matter if you already know or if you agree, and come back.

Just see if it's possible to slip into that feeling and try on,

BEing it.

BE the sensations.

Be the thoughts about the feeling too.

Even BE the thoughts about this stupid question your friendly Mind-Tickler is making a big deal of, and about whatever other things passing through.

Being all of it.

What if all that experience- this feeling, then that thought, then that one, and that one and that sound and those colors-

is what you are?

Can you see how decentralized that makes you, almost instantly?

How that usual, always-there, strong "sense" of self just...dissipates…

when there's no feeler, no witnesser, no owner, no controller…

No -er of any kind…

when there's just experience, happening?

Because if you are experience itself rather than The One doing the experiencing or The Witness who's aware of the experience…

where exactly is this 'you'?

You is unlocatable. You is center-less. You is everywhere.

Perhaps there's freedom in this.

Perhaps the usual responsible and centered sense of self has felt so solid all this time because the wrong questions have been asked.

All this time, thought has insisted you're the one who's asking and you're the one who's answering and you're the one who's experiencing.

When maybe instead, all along, you've been the experience itself.

Fluid. Fleeting. Present in the extreme. Not a thing. Not solid. Not there.

Not anywhere.

And then you might notice what happens to intense feeling or anything else when it's seen that you are it,

rather than a you who's supposedly feeling something.

That might be a whole different experience to BE.

Maybe not so urgent. Maybe not so important. Maybe not so wrong. Maybe not so real.

Which coincidentally is something a lot of folks reading The Mind-Tickler happen to want…

Either to feel better, or to truly understand that there is no you, or to be consciousness- the screen, rather than the show on the screen.

Hence, my gift to you.

And though of course this may all seem very weird,

And may bring up your disapproval or disagreement,

I hope you can play with it a little anyway.

Because wouldn't it be wonderful to actually get what you want for a change.

Even if it comes in an un-gift-wrapped, decentralized, no-center kind of gift box.

Which you also

get to Be.

"The experience is of consciousness experiencing itself."

~Nisargadatta

"When I was young
I looked at a lampshade
And saw God.
'The lampshade is God,' I said.
My parents, good people, said
'Perhaps God is in the lampshade, but God is not the lampshade.'
But I knew that God
Was the lampshade,
And the lamp,
And the table beneath the lamp,
And everything else.
And in the moment I said so, I knew who I was."

~Bruce Nygren

SOMETHING NOT RIGHT

September 7, 2021

"I'd like to do living better."

~Client

"It just goes to show you, it's always something - if it ain't one thing, it's another. You either got a toenail in your hamburger or toilet paper clinging to your shoe."

~Rosanne Rozannadanna (Gilda Radner)

Something's not right.

It's amazing how many of us live with some version of that feeling.

Often the culprit seems obvious and we can easily identify that "something" – it's problems with relationships, or work, or health.

Yet often there's really no specific problem to point to.

There's just this sense, anyway.

This uneasy feeling that wherever we are, we should be somewhere else. Whatever we're doing, we should be doing something else. Whatever we are as a person, we should be something else.

If we speak up, we should be quieter. If we're quiet, we should speak up more.

Something.

Quiet. Subtle. Nagging. A feeling that rarely goes away.

Which perhaps is why the fix-things marketplace is so huge. Perhaps it's why therapy and meditation and medication and enlightenment searches and self-improvement are all so pervasive.

Because everyone's trying to better something, enhance something, revise something. Everyone's trying to attain something.

Usually several somethings.

And commonly those fixes involve a wholesale denial that anything about our selves could possibly be accepted as inadequate. "No I am enough! I am complete! Yay empowerment! Yay love myself!"

Trying to force a sense of enoughness which almost never feels true.

Because affirmations and positive-thinking approaches really only apply after we get enlightened or fix these many little flaws.

After we're fixed, then we can say, yay us!

Proving that the idea that all is well does not in itself make us believe that all is well.

It feels off.

Because somewhere we know that improvement-thinking only perpetuates, reinforces, and even creates the sense of dissatisfaction with What Is.

So that even while we appear to try to fix not-rightness,

we are actually making more.

Leaving us stuck in unending circular dissatisfaction and seeking.

So, what if instead, we tried turning towards this sense of, "Something's not right," rather than trying to positive-empower it away?

Because pssst, that familiar sense of not-rightness could actually be correct.

It could be we know we're pretending to be what we're not.

It could be we know these selves are not what we are.

It could be that we feel the smallness of them everyday.

So that when we pretend we are important and we're all that matters (which is always,) we ignore the vast, focus on the small, and then have the constant disquieting sense that we're missing something.

We yearn to be part of a bigger whole, to be included, to belong, and to not miss out on anything. We yearn to be connected to all options, and to be all things.

While simultaneously insisting that being an improved, separate, individual is where it's at.

Trying to have it both ways.

We feel the offness of this confusion. It feels wrong.

We feel wrong.

"Something not-right" becomes intertwined with the sense of Me.

Because the persona never fits quite right.

Turns out, that sense of "something isn't right" has been true, all along.

Which is why so many, if not all, of us are familiar with it.

So rather than perpetually trying to fix what is actually not broken,

maybe we could try on a bit of acceptance. Just for fun and something different.

Because like it or not, approve or not,

we are What Is.

As is.

Yes, us.

And then quite paradoxically, we may start to see that we are enough- in all our incompleteness and smallness.

We may start to see that messed-up, incomplete Me is not wrong.

We may even come to see that "Wrongness" is right.

Making the familiar sense of, "Something's not right,"

A gift

Which reveals us to be

whole, complete, adequate.

With all our imperfection.

Making us actually

very right indeed.

"This thing that you are feeling is your own life."

~Alan Watts

"Others have given you
Methods and ways
To achieve Oneness.
Is not the achievement of Oneness
Preconditioned on the assumption of
Two-ness, of Duality, of
You and not-you?
How can you merge with
What you already are?"

~Wu Hsin

MIDDLE WAY LAUNDRY

September 14, 2021

"'I am bored.' Who knows this? 'I am angry, sad, afraid.' Who knows this? You are the knowing, not the condition that is known."

~Eckhart Tolle

"When you no longer believe everything you think, you step out of thought and see clearly that the thinker is not who you are."

~Eckhart Tolle

You know those thoughts you don't like?

Those *I should know betters* and *I messed ups* and *Others are doing better than I ams*? The *I'm a hopeless case*s and *I shouldn't have said that*s and *I'm a bad person/ family member/ friend, a loser, failure, lazy, unkind, angry, selfish, unenlightened, unmotivated*. Etc etc etc?

Yeah. Those.

Put all that delightful stuff in a great big mental laundry basket.

Throw in the feelings that come with those thoughts too- sadness, guilt, fear, depression, humiliation, anger.

Sweaty stuff, tear-stained stuff, unwanted stuff.

Toss it all in the basket.

There's probably a lot of it.

Nothing fun in there, right? I mean, ew.

So it probably doesn't make sense to spend hours and hours examining the contents of this basket, analyzing what made this smell, what made that stain, and then trying to change each piece into spun gold or a zen garden or whatnot.

There doesn't seem to be any advantage in that kind of busy-work.

And then, maybe it's also ok not to spend a lot of time focused on any one particular piece in the basket. I mean, not much point zeroing in on any one sock or unmentionable, is there?

After all, it's just a pile of laundry.

It can't bite, kick, or laugh at you. It can't torture you or leap out of the basket when your attention is elsewhere.

It sits there inanimate, harmless, minding its own business.

It has no power.

And now take a look inside the basket. Peer over the edge and get a good look.

Notice you have the ability to do that.

Whatever is looking at that pile – whatever sees the stinky thoughts- is it scared, depressed, angry?

If you get a ‘yes', put that yes and the accompanying feeling in the basket too.

And then notice what's left.

What's not in the basket? What's outside the basket, still seeing it?

Whatever that is, which is more likely to be what you are? Dirty pants, or whatever knows that pants are in the basket?

Now of course you may not be what knows, either.

But you're no sock, that much is clear.

Because you can't be both the thing that's seen and the thing that sees it.

Yes, a case can be made that you are indeed both, or even, neither.

And certainly The Mind-Tickler has made many such cases, many times.

But today we're playing with a less-dogmatic

middle way.

A practical and integrate-able way into everyday life which provides some relief and clarity.

Even if it's not the be-all, end-all, only way.

Because thoughts and feelings in a laundry basket are not you.

In which case, the next time life feels really challenging, there's no harm in getting a little distance from the wash.

There's no harm in putting difficult thoughts and feelings all into a heap, stepping back, taking a look at the collective pile,

And then noticing that you-

whatever that even is-

are looking at the pile.

Aware of the pile.

Not the pile.

Now of course no one ever has to do this.

It's just that getting a little distance from stinky basket stuff feels pretty good.

It feels sane, and so much better, to get a little space from the wacky notion that what you are is a thought/feeling sock.

Because less identification with crazy is a wonderful thing.

Feels pretty good.

Something knows this.

And it's not the laundry.

"Nobody told us that what we are is a point of awareness. This isn't something we're taught. Rather, we were taught to identify with our name. We were taught to identify with our birth date. We were taught to identify with the next thought that we have. We were taught to identify with all the memories our mind collects about the past. But all that was just more thinking. When you stand in your own authority, you meet that ultimate mystery that you are. Even though it may be at first unsettling to look into your own no-thingness, you do it anyway. Why? Because you no longer want to suffer. Because you're willing to be amazed. You're willing to be surprised. You're willing to realize that maybe everything you've ever thought about yourself really isn't true."

~Adyashanti

RESPONSIBILITY?

September 21, 2021

"Dear -----, I have watched Alan Watts, Eckhart Tolle and Mooji online. They speak about: there is no doer, no thinker, no knower, etc. What are they talking about? What does it all mean? Is everything spontaneous then? Every action isn't calculated or thought about? We are not really doing anything? I am not really doing this as I type out this question? I feel very confused. Thanks for your time. I look forward to your reply."

~Anonymous

"Everything happens for a reason. Except when it doesn't. But even then you can, in hindsight, fabricate a reason that will satisfy your belief system."

~Anonymous

So there I am pre-pandemic, dancing away in the middle of a dance competition. Dancing dancing dancing.

And then suddenly coughing coughing coughing.

Why? Well because I mis-swallowed my own spit of course.

And since no one else was hacking up a lung all over their wish-to-escape dance partners,

it had to be a personal problem.

It's a Commandment: Thou shalt swallow your spit properly. If you don't, that's on you.

So of course after my mis-swallow, God, the universe, karma, Zeus, Yama - all sitting in some celestial pub making up rules for humans and meting out consequences – stepped in to provide the coughing punishment I deserved.

Because it seems humans have the power and control to cause bad things, aka be at fault,

but then somehow don't have the power and control to sidestep the results.

This is what we call "responsibility."

We're in charge of success or failure, money in the bank, getting a hole in one, painting a masterpiece, writing brilliantly, the temperature of the planet, and whether polar bears go extinct.

We're in charge of how we feel and what we think and whether we judge or compare or dislike. We're even in charge of how "we make" other people feel and think too.

All happenings placed squarely on the me. I did this.

That's how it works. I don't make the rules.

Cause and effect is completely built-in to the sense of self. Everything is about the Me and what it did and what it caused and what it deserves.

We'll even make up dots to connect if we have to, as long as we're the center point and cause of what happens.

Although we might notice how heavy all that fault, blame, responsibility, free will and doership are.

It's heavy heavy stuff.

Which it really needs to be. Since heaviness keeps us from noticing how wispy the self actually is.

The substantialness of the self is enhanced by heaviness.

Sigh. Maybe we could consider a different point of view.

Maybe we could consider- what if it's actually not us doing anything? What if absolutely all happenings are-

literally and completely-

random?

Money, health, spit, failure, personality, feelings.

Random, random, random.

What if there are no connecting dots from experience A to result B? What if experience is new every second and has no prior cause or reason?

Of course no one has to believe any of this. It's just a point of view and a "what if." No harm in trying it on.

And it just may be worth playing with. Because believing we're in charge of what happens feels awful.

And random, though granted, might be almost completely incomprehensible to humans, feels way better. Much lighter. Much more spacious.

We might discover a whole different sense of self, if we play with peeling off faux responsibility and cause-effect from that self's aching back.

We might discover that, just like there is no self, there are also no gods watching, judging, and meting out punishment. Perhaps nothing is out there lining up our failures, just waiting to give us the smackdown when we misbehave.

It could even be that we've been free of the ties of good-girl and boy all along, and we just haven't noticed, so bent over have we been, carrying responsibility.

"Random" just may be the key to the unanchored, free-floating self.

Something so many lovely Mind-Tickler readers are looking for.

And who knows- that might be worth swallowing.

"The hand lifts, but you say 'I lift'. The eyes see but you say, 'I see'. The nose smells, but you say, 'I smell'. All this is the power of the Self and yet you say, 'I did it' That power belongs to God. Who is this ego arrogating 'I'? He has no place in the palace, but once admitted inside, he overrules the king and affirms his own existence. But after some enquiry, this ego's existence is easily disproved. Then the king once again affirms, 'I am Reality.' There is one thing about this condition – there is bliss. If there are two, then there is pain. Where there is One, there is bliss."

~Siddharameshwar Maharaj

"Do you think that I know what I'm doing?
That for one breath or half-breath I belong to myself?
As much as a pen knows what it's writing,
or the ball can guess where it's going next."

~Rumi

PAST TRAUMA

September 28, 2021

"We tend to regard ourselves as puppets of the past, driven along by something that is always behind us."

~Alan Watts

"Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in."

~Mario Puzo

Sometimes The Mind-Tickler inspires more Ticked-Offs than Tickles. Hopefully that won't be the case this time, but what follows may not be popular. So, if reading this makes you want to storm off angry, well, I get it, and it's been fun hanging with you for a while anyway.

Pretty much everyone has accepted the idea that past traumas are stored somewhere in us, waiting in an unseen dark place for opportunity to spring out and make us suffer.

We're told that the past is embodied, even encoded into our cells.

While waiting to somehow be "resolved," before allowing us to move on to a contented life, this painful past rules and controls our lives.

Wow, that makes this "past" stuff some powerful voodoo, no?

Though if we actually looked with new eyes at that belief-bug swimming in the Kool-Aid, we might discover that it's not only not there, but also really makes no sense.

First, because there's tons of research that shows that what we call memories are actually just a few tiny, vague, split-second current-moment mental images, strung together by thought and concocted into a cohesive narrative. (No need to believe me. There's always Mr. Google.)

Turns out, no matter how real it feels, or how certain we are that we remember accurately, or how many people verify our tale…

no one remembers the actual past.

The science is very clear.

Memories are completely made up.

But even if this was not the case, and even if what we think happened really did happen,

then logically, the wonderful stuff that happened is also stored in the DNA, and also rules our present.

Which means it's not only our miseries that are formative.

Meanwhile we devote all our energy and attention to trying to fix traumas that don't actually have the powers we attribute to them.

And it's not like we haven't given trauma work and therapy and sitting with feelings a really good long try. Yet here we are anyway, still thinking we're ruled by memories and pain and carrying them around forever.

Not to mention all that stewing, dissecting, validating and repeatedly summoning up the past- how exactly is that supposed to make things better?

And if it actually did improve things, there wouldn't be any folks left who are still dealing with trauma.

Everyone would have therapized it all away.

So those approaches aren't working. Under guise of "healing," repeatedly rehashing and re-feeling, over and over and over, this focus is actually re-opening scabs and holding pain in place.

Which I'm pretty sure is the opposite of what we want.

So maybe we could be open to something different. If only because the pain-is-in-there-forever idea is pretty darn miserable.

What if it was possible to say, "OK, yes, this bad thing happened. And now it's over. Now what? Moving on. Next brand new experience coming right up."

Well that would be different, wouldn't it?

And if, right about here, the mind screams outrage for this simple, "Now what?" question, we might consider why it's so eager to hold on to a story that brings so much pain.

Why is it so completely uninterested in not hurting?

This may even be where objections about "bypassing" come up.

But bypassing can only be a problem if one buys into the Pain-Is-Lying-In-Wait story. Without that, it's not "bypassing," it's just "feeling better."

Which I'm pretty sure would be ok with us.

So maybe all this time, we've been freer of the past than we thought.

We might finally be allowed to shift focus, feel better, and move on to present-focused, rather than past-focused, life and experiences.

And we might finally be allowed to leave past trauma in the stuffy stagnant land of, "Maybe or maybe not, it's long ago either way."

Which might be startling to a mind that likes to hoard and rehash its troubles and suffering.

But can still be amazingly free when we open the windows and let the breeze blow through...

Experiencing, alive,

and completely new

in every second.

"We think that the world is limited and explained by its past. We tend to think that what happened in the past determines what is going to happen next, and we do not see that it is exactly the other way around! What is always the source of the world is the present; the past doesn't explain a thing. The past trails behind the present like the wake of a ship and eventually disappears."

~Alan Watts

"The past has no power to stop you from being present now. Only your grievance about the past can do that. Die to the past every moment. You don't need it."

~Eckhart Tolle

"There is neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will be also the present when you experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Have a complete break with the past and see what happens."

~J. Krishnamurti

GRIEF

October 5, 2021

"Death means that the past must be abandoned, that the unknown cannot be avoided, that "I" cannot continue, and that nothing can be ultimately fixed. When a man knows this, he lives for the first time in his life."

~Alan Watts

"The wife is dear because of the love of the Self."

~Brahadaranyaka Upanishad

A friend of a friend's brother, someone I did not know, committed suicide this past weekend. The same day, a not-close-to-me elderly relative of my own also passed away.

Death was on the table for me this weekend.

Of course my heart went out to both families. I cried watching my cousins sob in the zoom funeral.

But I myself was not particularly overwhelmed with sadness or emotion.

Perhaps because there was a lot of relationship-space between me and these folks. I wasn't a part of either life.

And intensity of grief seems to depend on how involved we, the survivors, are in others' lives and situations.

More involved- more intense mourning. Less involved- less intense mourning.

Almost as if, if the self- the me- is not right at the center of things, there's no great pain.

And almost as if pain and intensity require the self to be center stage.

In fact weirdly, it starts to look like grief is actually more about concern for me the surviving self, than the deceased one.

Because no matter what any death's circumstances, or how it happens- even when it is someone sick and ready to go-

most survivors find reason to feel loss, guilt, anger, regret, and personal responsibility.

This becomes particularly clear in the case of suicides and accidents, where shock and mourning can be so intense.

Remaining family invariably wonders: Was this my fault? Could I have stopped it? Did I do enough? Did I let them down? How could I have let this happen? Should I have made that phone call, given the warning to drive carefully, taken their keys?

And even when death is not the result of an accident, and involves someone old and sick, still our pain manages to be about ourselves. I am lost. I have lost them. I will miss them. What happens to me now? What will my life be like without them? Where do I go from here? How will I go on?

There's an inevitable wonder about our own death and what we're in for someday, hopefully long down the road.

Is this what I'm in for? Will my death be like this? Can I avoid it if I do things differently?

So much "I" in all those tears.

Turns out every heartbroken thought is actually about the me.

The death of others is used to verify our own sense of individual self.

We call this mourning the loved one.

When actually it's about our own loss. We mourn them for our loss, and our identity.

This might get easier to see in those (very) rare times when we can remove the self-based, "But what about me and what I did" concerns.

Because what remains then is often love-filled relief and a far more them-centered celebrating of the one who's gone.

We may be happy for them, glad they're not hurting anymore, considerably less sad.

Though of course the mind is capable of turning even fewer tears into some deficiency-meaning about us as an individual.

Non-intensity is seen as a betrayal of the loved one, or a sign we're forgetting them, or an indication that we don't care and are unloving and insensitive or somehow broken.

Otherwise we'd be crying, right?

Perhaps we can see that that is still more of the same- just the sense of me, defining and monitoring itself.

As usual.

Luckily for all of us, love is not defined by any particular number of tears.

And not one bit of this is bad or should be different.

This is how it is. This is what humans do. We make everything about us.

So we're still going to experience grief, and sometimes very intensely.

It's just that maybe we're grieving something other than we think.

Because humans are self-ish. Grief is self-ish. Bereavement is self-ish. Loss is self-ish.

As in, about the self.

So we may continue to hate the idea that someday these selves and the selves of our loved ones will cease to be.

We may cry about it. We may want to cling, to control, to carry on.

Most likely we will continue to involve ourselves in others' deaths.

Because let's face it- loss of the known, loss of the body, loss of the spark of existence,

whatever that is-

Well, it can seem very scary, mournful, and sad.

So final, so permanent.

Which, if we're lucky, may ultimately bring us around to wondering

if death is indeed

final.

With or without "us."

"Why mourn the dead? They are free from bondage."

~Brahadaranyaka Upanishad

"Grief exists only so long as one considers oneself to be of a definite form. The dead are indeed happy. The dead man does not grieve. The survivors grieve for the man who is dead. Let the man find out his undying Self and die and be immortal and happy."

~Ramana Maharshi

"There is neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will be also the present when you experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Dancing in ecstasy you go,
my soul of souls.
Don't go without me.
Laughing with your friends,
you enter the garden.
Don't go without me.

Don't let the sky turn without me.
Don't let the Moon shine without me.
Don't let the Earth spin without me.
Don't let the days pass without me.

The two worlds are joyous because of you.
Don't stay in this world without me.
Don't go to the next world without me...

Some call you love,
I call you the King of Love.
You are beyond all imaginings,
taking me places I can't even dream of.
O Ruler of my Heart,
wherever you go...

Don't go without me."

~Rumi

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

October 12, 2021

"You scream
You shout
You rage
You want quit of it.
You push it away with all your strength.

But hear this. . .

It thrives on all the exercise
You give it.
It gets stronger when
You give it something to push up against...

The harder you struggle
The more surely you call the spider."

~Wayne Liquorman

"Look for what is looking."

~Sam Harris

A zillion years ago in one of my many depression phases, I'd watch TV at night and get more and more depressed as the night went on.

I looked very hard for why.

Not that knowing why would have changed anything.

I mean, nothing was happening, just me sitting there watching TV. Yet depression came every night, seemingly uncaused and tied to nothing.

I inevitably concluded I was just a screwed-up person who didn't even need a cause to be a mess.

Then one day, don't ask me how, I saw it.

All those TV shows and ads- especially the ads- depicting made-up people who had success, or love, or happiness, or some kind of "normal" life- they all triggered the painfully familiar thought,

"Others have it better than you. They are better than you. You? LOSER."

Y'know, just that typical thought.

"Just".

Just that commonplace, repetitive, had-it-a-million-times thought.

Which took me forever to see. Because I apparently expected the explanation to be something that stood out from the ordinary.

An announcement maybe: Yo yo yo! This right here! This is why!

Or trumpets. Sequins. Neon. Something big and obviously not usual.

Although, I was depressed a lot, so really how rare could the instigating thoughts have been?

No, the bringer of my depression was nothing out of the ordinary.

And I could never find the trigger.

Because it was part of my fabric.

I was repeatedly being built- constructed- on that thought.

The sense of the Me, the Judy, was being built on TV's pretend scripts about pretend people living pretend lives.

Unknowingly, I was gathering up fictions to prove unprovable theories about who I was as a supposedly real Person.

Fiction was being used as proof of the fiction of self.

Dependent on ordinary thoughts which came out of nowhere, bringing along with them ordinary feelings.

Feelings which, simply by their apparent existence, "felt as if" they anchored the sense of me solidly to heaviness.

Heaviness being a great self anchor.

Even though it's nothing, holding down nothing.

So it doesn't matter what any thought or explanation of feelings turns out to be.

It doesn't, and can't, prove fiction.

Because fiction is made up. Fiction isn't provable.

Those old ideas of "who I am," turned out to be just ordinary everyday thoughts, carrying lovely feelings like depression to help the wacky self come to some (bad) conclusion about itself.

To make sure I didn't forget I exist. Or to make sure not to notice that maybe I don't.

Luckily, blessedly, these days I know that none of this has anything to do with me.

Thoughts visit out of nowhere, dropping by like homeless folks who know they can get a handout at this address.

They sometimes seem to be "about" who I am as a person.

But it doesn't matter what nothing is about.

And even though thoughts sometimes lug feelings along with them, pretending that proves something about me,

It all comes and then goes.

And whatever it is that I am, it's still here.

So it can't be any of that here-and-then-not-here stuff.

Which makes any thought and feeling

nothing,

nothing special,

and certainly not

out of the ordinary.

"This world offers
So many distractions
That it is difficult
To perceive
The magnificence of
What is ordinary.
The simpler things get
The more beautiful
This life becomes."

~Wu Hsin

"Ram Tzu knows this...
There can be
Peace,
Wholeness,
Harmony,
Love,
Joy,
But when you are not there."

~Wayne Liquorman

BUT

October 19, 2021

"Yeah but no."

~Little Britain

"There is no self. But what about me?"

~Seekers

This is one of those seemingly light Mind-Ticklers which discusses the not-grand, but perhaps may be helpful and practical anyway.

It's a subject that probably gets in the way of what you want all the time.

A subject you think you already know.

But you don't.

Because maybe you're doing some form of inquiry but feel stuck on the hard stuff. Or maybe you're doing your best to "sit with feelings" but it's uncomfortable.

Or maybe you're seeking an understanding of nonduality or consciousness and reality or yourself, but there's still more to get.

Or maybe you understand no-self but there's still a sense that HELLOOO, you're RIGHT HERE.

Very likely, my exploring friend, you are run by BUTs.

Those three letters own you.

Because they take you not where you want to go, but where they want to go.

Redirect, rerouting, sending you off on another direction.

The little rascals change the subject.

As if thought says, (belligerently, triumphantly,) "Ok I'll play along. But soon as I can I'm going back to the way I do things. We're wasting our time here."

Which you probably know.

I mean it's common knowledge that Yes, but really means no. It's common knowledge that, pretending to add to the yes, BUT actually negates it.

BUTs essentially cancel the first part of their sentences.

"Is it true? No, but it feels like it."

Um, okay.

So why is this so common that everyone does it, even while knowing better?

Because the mind's entire game is to hide the self's nonexistence.

It's a one trick pony, but it employs many strategies.

BUT is an easy, everybody-says-it-so-no-one-notices ploy.

Which is why there's a special kind of irony in exploring oneness-of-being in some way, while at the same time inserting BUT into every inquiry, every self examination, every meditation, every statement of feeling (except bad ones.)

Because BUT always equals two. Two viewpoints, two answers, two feelings, two thoughts.

So much for oneness.

Meanwhile, which is the answer? Is it true or isn't it? Is the feeling welcome or isn't it? Do you experience no-self or don't you?

There's only one answer. If truth exists, there's only one of it.

So it might be fun next time, to play with what an answer or understanding feels like, without tacking on a BUT (or any of its little friends: however, and, except, yet, and still)

What would understanding feel like without a BUT?

Now to be clear, this isn't about trying to stop BUT from coming.

That's not going to work anyway. Stopping thought is not in your power.

Instead, if you want to play with a different experience, tell the BUT to wait. Tell it to come back later.

Any feels-urgent-but-is-it BUT can wait 10 minutes.

And then you get to have the fun of seeing if it even bothers to return at all, once there's no longer a need to divert.

You get to see what it feels like to actually notice, attend to, and honor the first part of your answer...

The part said before the BUT came along to eliminate it.

"I can't find the self." PERIOD.

"This feels better." PERIOD.

"This feeling is welcome." PERIOD.

I mean, who knows, maybe the usually strong sense of self, with all its many opinions and feelings,

might even begin to feel a little less solid, a little less tangible, a little less viable,

when BUT isn't given free reign to poop all over your answers and the first part of sentences.

Now granted, you may be thinking, "But this is stupid. Asking the BUT to wait is too simple."

And maybe you're right.

But in that case it's no big deal to try it, and there's not much to lose, is there.

Or it could turn out that maybe this is a very simple way to play with something more than book-learning, something more than intellectualized concepts which never do feel real for you.

Because till now, the BUTs haven't let them.

But there's only one way out find out.

"The fool will laugh at you, but the wise man will understand."

~Linji Yixuan

"It may seem we're on a path, but we are always back where we started."

~Rupert Spira

"I know you're tired but come, this is the way."

~Rumi

FEELINGS

November 2, 2021

"Emotion arises. There's nothing to be done about them. They dont need to be honored or pushed away or anything else. They just are what is."

~Tony Parsons

"Identification with sensation makes the self. If there is no identification; is there a self?"

~J. Krishnamurti

Feeeelings, nothing more than feeeelings.

Gosh feelings seem important don't they?

Majorly important. Demanding of attention important.

I mean, we judge every experience by how we feel, and whether we like that feeling.

Every single experience. Evaluated based on feeling.

That's important.

Naturally then, there are many approaches for feelings management.

Many methods. Many experts. Many beliefs.

Allow, Welcome, Sit with, Breathe into, Listen to, Honor. Find out what lies beneath. Interpret meaning. Meditate (or medicate) so that the resulting calm leaks into other life situations later.

Though maybe we don't need all that instruction or control management. Maybe we can just check our own experience.

For instance when we're hurting, there's no question we're alive, is there?

Lots of people feel alive only when they're feeling intensely.

Otherwise they feel bored, numb, empty, dissatisfied.

For many many people, if there's too much peace, mind starts looking for the next problem to fret about.

Almost as if we can't bear to be separated from intensity for too long.

Almost as if, *I feel, therefore I exist*.

Hmmm.

Could it be that feelings are a trick designed to draw our

attention away from something?

A situation arises, we feel "bad," we can't focus on anything other than trying to feel "better."

And what are we not noticing while our attention is all about some feeling?

Well for one thing… we don't notice what exactly is doing the allowing, sitting-with, validating, and interpreting.

What feels feelings?

What pays attention to them? What interprets them?

Especially, what benefits from all that focus on a few sensations?

"I am sad / afraid / ashamed."

"I AM (*insert intensity word here)*."

Feelings are a strategy to solidify the sense of self.

They seem to prove us.

In fact, they're our only real evidence.

How do I know I exist? Well I feel it. I sense it. There's a sense of me.

That's our proof. The decoy works.

Intensity creates the story of self.

Never mind that there's no one provable who's experiencing, or that nothing real actually benefits from all that attention.

And though intensity might indeed sometimes fade away with all the focus and welcoming we give it…

That's only after it's established the 'you' that is feeling it.

When we focus on how things feel, we solidify the self, we solidify the sense of being a body, and we miss entirely that…

It doesn't matter what we feel.

Feelings come, feelings go, they carry no meaning on their little nerve endings, they contain no definition of a person.

All of that is added to, loaded onto, any sensation. By thought.

And we know how trustworthy that is.

Now I realize that saying this is scandalous, possibly even infuriating.

After all, we're all completely used to, indoctrinated even, to the idea that feelings are vitally, center-stagely, important.

Like a religion, really.

So maybe it's very upsetting for your friendly Mind-Tickler to point out that emotions are just sensations. No less. Certainly no more.

So let's be clear, I'm not belittling feeling. I'm not saying don't feel. I'm not saying bypass.

None of that's really a choice anyway. Feeling does what it wants.

If it wants our devotion, it gets our devotion.

I'm just calling attention to something different for a change.

Something other than preferences about body sensations.

Something not defined, or created, by those sensations.

Something that's nothing.

Because nothing isn't capable of hurting.

And isn't that what we're hoping for by dealing with feelings, or pursuing happiness, in the first place?

So enjoy nothing.

It can't hurt.

"This we have now
is not imagination.
This is not
grief or joy.
Not a judging state,

or an elation,
or sadness.
Those come
and go.
This is the presence
that doesn't.
And ...
This we have now."

~Rumi

PLAYING PRETEND

November 9, 2021

"There is no way you can use the word "reality" without quotation marks around it."

~Joseph Campbell

"It's a logical flaw to think that if we have to take it seriously, we also have to take it literally."

~Donald Hoffman

When I was a kid, coming from generations of musicians, a lot of my play life resembled those old Andy Rooney /Judy Garland movies: "Hey! Let's put on a show in the barn!" There was a lot of playacting, a lot of singing into hairbrushes, a lot of posturing in front of mirrors.

Grown up now, pretending continues, just not nearly so obviously.

To be clear, I'm not talking about lying or being inauthentic or showing off.

I'm talking about the very basic, completely inherent, everywhere-all-the-time impersonating that every single human does, every single day, 24/7.

Human lives are built on pretend.

Hoodwinking ourselves to believe obviously illusory stuff is partly why so many of us often feel like something isn't right, or something is missing, or we did the wrong thing, etc.

We sense the counterfeit and it doesn't sit right.

Don't believe me? Great, let's see.

We'll start small.

Let's talk about the literal review we do, like any critic after a Broadway show, evaluating our performance after any social situation or work event. "Ugh, did I say the wrong thing? Did I upset them? Did I do well, did I impress them, did I behave like a fool? What do the reviewers think of me?"

Let's notice we use the word "performance." for these situations.

The Me, star of every show. Singing into the hairbrush for the critics.

Or going a bit bigger now, how about everybody's favorite- feelings. What are they, anyway? They're not actually findable in the body. No surgeon has ever scooped out anxiety and said, "Ok, got it all, close ‘er up." Humiliation doesn't have a location, love isn't hanging out in a place inside, sadness is not in a closet somewhere. It just feels like they're there. They're not literally there.

Or continuing with anxiety, have you ever noticed it comes up after rough or scary situations? It happens later, when we're safe, and sitting in our favorite chair or lying in our own bed, scared about something that isn't happening.

As if we're practicing fear for later. Y'know, as in, rehearsing.

And how about love? We love pretending that it's about someone else. Until we notice it's a feeling of ours. And most often, love only happens if it has to do with us. "You make me feel so good. You make me feel like my best self. You're my best friend. You're there for me."

Love is also about The Me. We just pretend it's about someone else.

Or, still searching for anything that is not pretend or imagination, how about money? Money's a real, touchable thing, right?

Except that, once upon a time, humans arbitrarily choose one metal out of all the metals on earth to stand for money, to represent or symbolize money.

Even though a symbol isn't something real. It's an idea. A made-up, everybody-plays-along concept. "We shall all agree this gold hunk of metal stands for something important."

And then later, when lugging around metal got to be too much, everyone agreed to switch to paper, and now it's paper we pretend is valuable and important.

Don't even get me started on crypto.

Need more proof that we're living a pretend, illusory life?

How about time- past, present, future?

We live by the clock, another representation, although, of what, exactly? What is time?

And what a fun story- "the past." It's already-gone time. It was here, called "the present," and now it's gone and renamed "the past." But where it's gone to is a mystery. Its existence is proven by images- colors on screen or paper- or by memory, that notorious who-knows-what which has been shown repeatedly to be almost always inaccurate. Even the word "history" contains the word "story."

And of course there's the future- time yet to come. I wonder where it lives while it's waiting for its big moment on the stage. Does that moment ever come? Does the future ever arrive?

Or we could talk about furniture, trees, other people. Those must surely be real. But... they appear in our eyeballs, our ears, our fingertips. There's no proof they are outside The Me.

Oh dear. Could it be even others are still The Me, pretending to be something else?

Or look at the reality of self, personality, mind, thought, good, bad, right, wrong. Every bit of that is variable and dependent on context and situation and on what part of the planet we were born.

But nothing real varies based on location or context. If it's real, it's real no matter what.

Aw hell. Where's reality? Where's the not-illusion, the not-pretend?

Nowhere, man.

Illusion is where humans live. Playing pretend is what we do. We live in an agreed-on fantasy.

Even if we lived like Ramana in a cave, this would be the case.

So yay us! We get to act out stories and play pretend.

Like any little kid.

Musical numbers, sword fights and wars, tears, mistakes, laughter, love! Whoo hoo!

Yes we do know it's a game. We do know it's pretend.

We've agreed to play the part.

Because it's fun.

I mean, aren't we lucky?

This show we're putting on in the barn is wild.

"No thought you have ever had is true. No opinion you have ever held is right. Let them go. No idea you have of yourself, or of who or what you are, has ever corresponded to reality. Or ever will. Let them go....Let grace stop you."

~David Carse

LACK OF MOTIVATION

November 16, 2021

"He who thinks he is the doer is also the sufferer."

~Ramana Maharshi

"As the mind sees things are getting done, it concludes that there must be a someone who does them, otherwise doing would not occur. But the vastness has never waited for the mind to recognize that there is no doer for doing to occur."

~Suzanne Segal

I work with a lot of people who struggle to get motivated.

Apparently there's a whole lot of stuff not getting done out there.

There are taxes overdue, books not written, new businesses not launching. There's de-cluttering not happening, exercise not happening, homework not done.

Leaving the house for chores is a big deal for some. And forget about phone calls- so much stalling instead of calling.

Pretty much everyone stalls about something.

We call this "Lack of Motivation."

As if it's missing. And as if motivation can be had, scored, grabbed, in quantity.

At will. Our will.

Like getting fistfuls of Halloween candy. We just have to reach out and grab.

Because we're supposed to earn the candy. We're supposed to do the hard work before we're entitled to the rewards. We're supposed to deserve good stuff.

And we don't. We just sit there, undeserving.

If only we were more like other people and did things ahead of schedule and worked harder. Then we'd be entitled to reap our rewards.

So we push. Comparing, harassing, and hating on ourselves with visions of crappy consequences and wasted opportunities.

Turning to self-help books, hypnosis, affirmations and organizing plans and structure for accomplishing.

Trying – unsuccessfully- to force ourselves to Do.

Which all starts to mean something about who we are as a person.

Lazy. Useless. Dirty. A waste of space and life. Not a contributing member of society. Not living up to potential. Broken, wrong, bad.

Sitting on the couch defines us.

And it's not a definition we like.

The thing is though, if we think about it, there's lots we want to do, lots we intend to do, lots we know would feel better once it got done.

We yearn to accomplish. We want to make things happen. We're eager to get going.

Isn't that motivation?

Huh.

Motivation isn't actually lacking. We've got plenty of it.

Yet we're sitting on the couch anyway.

Maybe motivation is not what instigates action. Maybe motivation is actually unable to force anyone to get up and at 'em.

In fact, for some, poke too much and there's more, not less, inclination to stay actionless. Just out of spite or fear.

How is it possible we haven't noticed that all the mean berating of ourselves, all the attempted inspiring with visions of an awful consequences, actually isn't motivating at all?

Turns out, constant finger-stabbing produces the opposite of what we're aiming for.

Turns out we don't have a clue how to control our behavior and productivity.

Turns out we struggle for control because we don't have any.

Doing is a happening that's out of our hands.

Which of course seems outrageous to the inner voice that says, "Well I have to be in control! Otherwise Nothing Will Get Done!"

But it's already not getting done. Even with the inner yelling at us.

That voice simply hasn't noticed that it has no power. And that it simply has no clue what to do.

We're not in charge of this.

No amount of motivation can give control we don't have.

So what would it feel like if we could see that we're a passenger, not the driver?

And that non-doing is not our doing?

What if none of this is our fault (despite what has been learned and ingrained?)

Well then, maybe then we can give ourselves a break.

Even if that seems opposite to what's called for.

Because let's face it, we don't know what's called for. We don't know how to make ourselves the boss of motivation and action.

Luckily though, and perhaps shockingly, relaxing a responsibility we don't really have anyway, can relax fear of lack and failure.

Which can relax constraints on action.

Getting ourselves out of the way just might allow action to be taken.

Things might just begin to get done.

Without us.

Allowing a Doer that does know how to get things done,

to do its job, unharassed.

What a relief.

And it could just be that

we deserve that gift.

Just for being alive.

"Who grows the oranges in the orange tree? Who grows the grass? Who takes care of the world and the earth? The same power that takes care of all the things on this planet."

~Robert Adams

"From man's perspective in this intricate game of love,
It is so easy to become confused and think you are the doer.
But from God's infinite certainty,
He always Knows that He is the only one
Who should ever be put on trial."

~"Hafez" / Daniel Ladinsky

MINDING WHAT HAPPENS

November 23, 2021

"Here is my secret. I don't mind what happens. That is the essence of inner freedom. It is a timeless spiritual truth: release attachment to outcomes, deep inside yourself, you'll feel good no matter what."

~J. Krishnamurti

"Where there is ruin,
there is hope for a treasure."

~Rumi

The man has booked the free session I offer. He tells me of countless satsangs and silent retreats he's been through, daily meditations, repeated trainings with well-known manifestors, LSD downed, frogs licked. And now here he is with me.

"Great, what are you hoping you'll get here? What did you want when you booked this time?"

Oh nothing. Everything in life is great. He understands things, nothing bothers him, he gets there is no self, he gets that this is it, and it's all love, and he's sure he has the choice to make his life better.

"Glad to hear. So what are we doing here, instead of you being off enjoying your good, no-problem life? What is lacking that you hope to get?"

Again, nothing.

Ah. Got it.

Another spiritual seeker bouncing from method to podcast to teacher to online forum- looking looking looking-

While pretending to be more together, more calm, more evolved, more in control than he is. Unable to admit he hasn't found what he's looking for, and that all those life-consuming, money-consuming methods have not done the job.

Oh dear. Now the man is angry. Probably because I am saying all this out loud.

The thing is, let's face it, we all want something- and usually lots of somethings. We all do mind what happens. Even Krishnamurti, despite that famous quote above, minded very much what happened. Just like everyone else.

Because no alive human escapes personhood. And being a person hurts and feels inherently wrong.

Why? Well, because persons are images, illusions. We know it, we feel it. Which is partly why it's common for people to say things like, I'm not good enough, or Something is missing, or No matter what I do, I feel I should be doing something else, or There's something wrong with me.

Humans sense the vast connectedness, we feel apart from it, and we want to, we yearn to, rejoin what we are.

Though of course the self will never be big enough for that. We feel not enough because we're not enough. Because images can never be enough.

There's no way illusion can feel satisfying.

Meanwhile, trying to look like we're calm and wise, or trying to match some spiritual myth of what life should be- well, that's a good way to increase - not decrease- a sense of not good enough and fraud.

And playacting that we're doing better than we are, presenting a together image, doesn't make us actually better or more together.

That doesn't get us what we want; it just causes us to miss our actual experience, in favor of some fantasy.

And isn't it funny that we think playacting that we're doing great makes us look good? When actually it reveals how terrified we are to not be a polished perfect image.

Whew. No wonder seeking hasn't worked out.

Besides, even if we could pull off matching ourselves to some mythological standard of enlightened life,

or even if we could somehow achieve not minding what happens,

are we so sure we even want that?

I mean, how ferociously dull would life be if it contained only calm and peace, only joy and love? How long would it take till we wanted to feel more, to have surprise, to get riled up and enjoy some hot intensity?

Aiming for not minding what happens could easily turn into, Be careful what you wish for.

Thankfully existence, in all its infinite variety, is far more interesting, doing its own thing, than any crazy human fantasy wants.

And thankfully, the way things are is hugely, vastly, incomprehensibly better, as is,

than the tedious monotony we can only imagine would be preferable.

So if we really want to not-mind something, perhaps we could play with not minding being imperfect, not minding being not enough. We could play with not minding craving, not minding missing out, not minding being a fraud.

Then if there's anything left over, we could play with not minding that we do indeed mind what happens.

That's a not-minding WHAT IS, rather than what isn't.

Which is a helluva lot easier than trying to create perfection out of mirage.

Especially when WHAT IS is already an astonishing miracle.

And who,

or what,

can mind that?

"You will never be satisfied until you find out that you are what you are seeking. If you want knowledge as an individual, you will not get it here."

~Nisargadatta

"You can't wake a person who is pretending to be asleep."

~Navajo Proverb

"You don't wake up by perfecting your dream character."

~Jed McKenna

PERFECT?

November 30, 2021

"Why is the mind occupied so endlessly? The businessman with his business, the artist with his painting, the pianist with his - you follow? And you and I, ordinary people- why? Is it fear of not being occupied? If you are not occupied, what? What are you then?"

~J. Krishnamurti

"When we imagine that we have found it, we don't like it."

~Alan Watts

Imagine living your absolutely perfect life.

Everything exactly right, everything you could ever want.

As vividly as possible, picture the details.

Stay with it.

Notice what happens after minute, or even a few seconds.

The mind... wanders.

It's not interested. It's…

BORED.

Whaaat? Even perfect isn't perfect?

Wow, if the most perfect life is uninteresting, imagine how lacking your actual life must be.

Shouldn't there be more? Love, success, happiness, money, friends, adventure, fun?

Shouldn't there be better? Personality, social skills, talents, thoughts, feelings?

This can't be all there is. This can't be it. I mean, what's the point?

Though somehow, despite all that protesting and lifelong chasing, it seems we have little actual interest in perfection.

For instance, our eye is perpetually drawn towards what isn't perfect blue sky. Clouds, birds, planes.

Perfectly clear sky? Empty. Uninteresting.

i mean, sure, in our day to day lives we work endlessly towards getting perfection in love, work, looks, talents, health, spirituality. We certainly dream of attaining it.

But actually *getting?*

Feh.

Humans lean toward dissatisfaction. That's our default setting.

So we want something going on. The bigger the better.

Because when something's happening,

even if it feels bad,

there's no question we're alive, is there?

Could it be that's what boredom, and the sense of not-enough, is for?

To prove there's a ‘me' that's alive, real, unquestionably…

Here?

I mean, whether its boredom or depression or panic or shame…

Intensity demands attention.

We can't ignore it.

That focus solidifies the sense of ‘Me'. That focus solidifies the idea that what feels bored is ‘Me'.

Boredom does the job.

This isn't interesting, this isn't enough, this isn't good. I need something more.

Boom. There we are.

It works.

Though if we really do want to feel better, or if we happen to be seeking "enlightenment,"

we might see that we can't attain either by focusing on the deficiency of this moment.

Because that's not presence. That's inadequacy. Inadequacy is, by definition, not enough. And not-enough is never what we want.

So the thing is, what if it doesn't matter?

What if we could starve dissatisfaction and imperfection of attention?

As in, "Bored? Fine. Wanting something different in this life? OK, yep. Next."

As in, "Hello again, habitual attraction to intensity and story of incomplete self."

Maybe then the thought, "There must be more to life," can stop being such a big, gotta-fix-this, life-sucking vampire.

Maybe then there's just a fleeting feeling and thought arising.

And that's about it.

We might begin to see that boredom, emptiness, not-enoughness, is nothing more than a trick of thought.

A meaningless experience, good as any other, not imperfect, not needing changing.

Same life.

Lots less work.

Which just might feel… oh, I don't know...

better.

Not boring.

Huh.

Perfect.

"You will never be satisfied until you find out that you are what you are seeking. If you want knowledge as an individual, you will not get it here."

~Nisargadatta

"In first grade Mrs. Lohr
said my purple teepee
wasn't realistic enough,
that purple was no color
for a tent,
that purple was a color
for people who died,
that my drawing wasn't
good enough
to hang with the others.
I walked back to my seat
counting the swish swish swishes
of my baggy corduroy trousers.
With a black crayon
nightfall came
to my purple tent
in the middle
of an afternoon.

In second grade Mr. Barta
said draw anything;
he didn't care what.
I left my paper blank
and when he came around
to my desk
my heart beat like a tom tom.
He touched my head
with his big hand
and in a soft voice said
the snowfall
how clean

and white
and beautiful."

~Alexis Rotella

FREE WILL REDUX

December 7, 2021

"The freest of my actions just happens like hiccups inside me or like a bird singing outside me."

~Alan Watts

"The choices that will be made will be made, and you've no choice about that."

~Jeff Foster

"In the dream we're absolutely sure ‘we' choose this and avoid that and do that and not that. For the individual who thinks they're in control of their life, that fallacy that you're the ‘managing director' of your life and can make it continue, that falls away, and that feels risky…"

~Tony Parsons

This time of year here in Pennsylvania, one sees many dead deer on the sides of roads. This is because it's mating season, and deer run wildly onto roads paying zero attention to anything around them, aiming for whatever it is on the other side that compels them to dash for it.

You'd think after so many years of watching their buddies die this way, that deer would have adapted and learned to see all those speeding cars, step back, wait, and choose to be safe before bounding into traffic. But no.

Because there is no choice involved. They start running and that's that.

This past weekend, in my time on Robert Saltzman's livestream *(see links below)*, the subject of choice and free will came up over and over.

Which is not surprising. Most folks are verrry attached to the idea that they're in charge of what happens to them, that they make decisions and their own choices.

People urgently, fervently, want free will to be a thing. For hundreds of years they have asked about it.

For hundreds of years sages, mystics, artists, and science- tons and tons of science- have all said clearly, *NO*.

And then, have those askers said, "Oh great, ok, thanks!?"

Nope, they have argued- forcefully, incredulously- with those answers. for centuries. Because there's no way *NO* is what they want to hear.

So let's face it, when questions of free will come up, those are not really questions. Those are prayers of hope, wishes, and crossed fingers.

Which is especially curious when it comes to nondual spiritual folks.

I mean, ok yeah, there is no self and no doer and we are not what we think we are and this is it and blah dee blah.

But somehow this not-me thing IS me, and it decides what to do next, and has the power to make its own choices so that it can be in charge of what happens to its not-there-self.

Um, what?

To be fair, it is totally understandable that humans might be scared crapless by the idea that we're not the boss of our lives. After all, somewhere over the millennia, humans have developed the concept of future.

And now that there supposedly is a future, it's logical that we would want to find a way to control it so that it isn't so darn mean to us.

Otherwise existence is uncertain. Otherwise who knows what might happen.

And of course there's no way to make uncertainty safe.

Ack! This is terrifying.

It's a fear runs quietly, and sometimes not at all quietly, in the background for almost every human.

Because what happens to the strong sense of being a person, an individual, if we entertain the possibility that nothing that happens is our doing, and that no choice is actually made by us?

Once that's considered without an immediate argument,

We begin to sense the wispiness of these individual selves. We begin to sense the vastness of something not-me, something bigger, something not individual, in which no one self is the center of anything.

We begin to sense the illusion of the self at all.

Uh oh.

Says the person.

No, it's much preferred for the character to pretend that it is the star, that it writes its own scripts, that its stage play is real, and that it is more than a fictional character.

Meanwhile existence does its own thing, has always done its own thing, despite our choices and plans and our time upon the wicked stage.

Still, of course we humans are welcome to hold on tight to the idea of free will and personal choice anyway.

Even if that idea is illusion, and delusion.

It's just that delusion doesn't feel good. We think it is comforting to be in charge but actually, that supposed power brings paralysis, fear, guilt, shame, and failure.

As opposed to peace in not being the boss, relief of not having to figure things out, and the sweet curiosity of seeing what happens next.

There's even relief in being allowed to be afraid- afraid of not knowing, of being in charge of nothing, of actually being nothing.

So without the illusion of free will, we get surprise, we get sweetness, we get relief, we get peace.

Which is quite the gift.

And makes the choice about free will

Much ado about nothing.

"Give up to grace.
The ocean takes care of each wave 'til it gets to shore.
You need more help than you know."

~Rumi

"Ringing like trumpets,
Two choices.
Yelling and coercing, arguing and reasoning.
Like a tennis match, our attention back and forth

We slump in the chair, our head heavy
with the weight of decision,
eyes red from sleepless nights and tears.

When you just cant choose, admit defeat and
The soft, clear voice of the third choice will call
The third choice doesn't need force,
Simply waits for you to notice.
It is the answer to your dreams and hopes.
And it is not alone,
It comes from infinite possibility.
So let go, admit your powerlessness to choose
And wait for the call
Of the third choice."

~Unknown author

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

December 21, 2021

"We realize with a jolt that what we perceive is never the world directly, but rather our brain's best guess at what that world is like, a kind of internal simulation of an external reality. Still, we bank on the fact that our simulation is a reasonably decent one."

~Amanda Gefter

"Without the projection of the mind, the world cannot exist."

~Jac O'Keeffe

"Reality is only a Rorschach ink blot."

~Alan Watts

"I know this is true because I directly experienced it," said the random guy on Facebook.

Well. Can't argue with *that*, can we? I mean, he experienced it. So it must be true.

We'l just ignore if our own personal experience happens to clash with his personal experience.

Or more likely, we'll argue with him about whose is right. *(Hint- it's definitely ours.)*

Yes we do all love that ol' personal experience.

Everything we think is real is based on it. For most everyone, first-hand knowledge is the final arbiter of reality and Truth.

Even though by definition, "personal experience" means, specific to Me, with all my unique slants, perspectives, conclusions, information and thoughts.

Y'know, person-al.

There are the colors and shapes seen in our eyeballs, sounds heard in our ears, touch experienced in our fingertips, our skin receptors. There are emotions felt in our bodies, aided and interpreted by thoughts we also call ours.

Let's face it, we only know what's what when it comes through our filters.

Otherwise, we can't know anything.

At all.

Which means that all experience is always specific only to us. Which means it has nothing to do with objective Truth.

And when we presume that it does, we're basically saying, "My way is the way. What I encounter is all there is."

Which is only just a little arrogant. Ok maybe a lot arrogant.

Because this know-it-all-ness, based strictly on what we see, hear and feel personally, is kind of breathtaking.

I mean here we are experiencing, and somehow we come to believe that these particular-to-us happenings prove something about the "real world," a supposedly fact-based, unbiased, and independent real thing.

We're quite certain of this.

Even though, when we do perceive anything, those perceptions are still only our eyes, ears, fingertips, experiencing.

Personal truth. Not objective truth.

Can you say "projection," boys and girls?

It's not like this is just sometimes, either. No, we're 100% projecting our personal experience at all times, non-stop.

And calling it, "reality."

So for those who enjoy being important or special- which is pretty much everyone - at least this is good news.

Because it means that we were right- we are the center of the universe; it is all just us projected out into everything. We are necessary. We matter.

Whooo hooo! We knew it!

Oddly enough though, it can also be good news for those who are interested in the idea of Enlightenment and No-Self, too.

Because when we begin to see that our Very Important Personal Experience is only a viewpoint, and that all of our, "Of course reality is real!" certainty can only ever be projection…

Our usually-strong sense of being an individual with a translatable experience may just begin to get wispy.

Because when we don't lug around all the limitation that comes with "objective reality," the sense of self may begin to feel lighter and less concrete.

Now of course I'm not saying that any of this is ever the least bit necessary. It's just that many lovely Mind-Tickler readers happen to be curious about this particular individual-not-individual, self-not-self, thing.

And as a doorway in, the consideration of what is real vs what is our biased, deceptively separate experience, can be very enlightening.

Even though no amount of considering will ever reveal what is actually real.

Because we will never be able to get outside these perceiving machines.

So an undebatable, unalterable Truth which is not tainted by or based on personal experience- something outside the self-

is something we will never know.

Because it can't be known. Not by us little humans, anyway.

Which is fine. We don't need it.

Though that particular Don't-Know-and-Never-Will enables….

Oh I don't know.

Who knows?

We'll never know.

Hey where'd we go?

"The world presented to us by our perceptions is nothing like reality. Evolution drives truth to extinction. We've been shaped to have perceptions that keep us alive, so we have to take them seriously. If I see something that I think of as a snake, I don't pick it up. If I see a train, I don't step in front of it. I've evolved these symbols to keep me

alive, so I have to take them seriously. But it's a logical flaw to think that if we have to take it seriously, we also have to take it literally."

~Donald Hoffman

"The world doesn't exist. It's all an illusion. It never did exist. It's all the reflection of a concept. There is No One and Nothing. It's literal. Are you ready to live without a world? Is that what you really want? Are you willing to lose the moon?"

~Byron Katie

ANOTHER NEW-YOU NEW YEAR

December 28, 2021

"Drop the idea of becoming someone, because you already are a masterpiece. You cannot be improved."

~Osho

"What if we said, "This is the way it is; this is what it means to be human," and decided to sit down and enjoy the ride?"

~Pema Chödrön

In a few days it'll be another new year.

Brand new, coming right up!

Well, ok the moment isn't even at the same time in all parts of the world, and somehow it looks a whole lot like yesterday's old year... but still.

Time to pretend that something old is ending ('Bye! Good riddance!) and that something new is beginning (Please please please).

Something better. Something Improved.

Something thinner, cleaner, nicer, and more enlightened.

Yep, it's the annual Pretend-I-Want-To-Fix-Me time.

Oh yay. Ritualized comparing to an idealized version of how we're supposed to be, and finding ourselves lacking! Whoo hoo!

I mean let's face it, we all know these self things are too fat or not peaceful enough or they drink too much or game too much or are too out of shape or are either too busy or too unproductive.

We all know what we need is more self-care and only-necessary pants organized by color tidily in the closet. That'll do it.

So resolutions are made, with vows that this year, proper rules of proper personhood will be properly followed.

Never mind that when we make these resolutions, we completely know we're not actually going to keep them.

Not for long anyway. Just long enough to keep up the sham.

Oh yes honey, of course we know this. Noticing how many times, how many years, the same resolutions have been made and then quickly broken, we'd have to be idiots otherwise.

Humans pretend to want improvement while actually having zero intention of fixing these messy selves.

Because there's only one thing on this earth that is perfect and unflawed.

Plastic.

And we hate plastic.

We don't even like the thing we're supposedly trying to be.

So clearly, improving the self is not the actual intention of these yearly vows.

No, the actual intention is what actually happens.

Validation of the wrongness of self.

New Year's is a ritual that shows us, year after year, that we totally know we are not what we are pretending to be.

We know we are not this self story. We know we are not the ego, the personality, the overly-well-fed body staring at its phone, reading this Mind-Tickler and perhaps muttering, "What the hell is she talking about?"

We know.

Which is why New Year's resolutions are so often privileged, and frivolous, and, year after year, change absolutely nothing.

Because obviously, nothing in this universe cares if any particular body on planet Earth drinks or smokes or dies at 20 instead of 80.

Nothing needs us fixed. Nothing needs us improved. Nothing finds us lacking as is.

Not even us.

Not actually.

If we did, we'd stick to those resolutions.

Not sure? Curious readers can always check for themselves.

Sense into whatever you really are- whatever that is, and however you do it, just being sure to leave it undefined or unnamed for a moment-

Feel in, and see if that essence of what you are is altered by alcohol or chips or closets or money. See if the real you -whatever that is- becomes better if the body eats broccoli. See if it needs anyone to be more peaceful, more enlightened, more anything.

See if it agrees that the brilliant person reading this brilliant Mind-Tickler needs improvement.

Now of course, if one's idea of a good time is to promise to clean the bathroom, or to throw out all the cigarettes, or to sit in lotus position with

closed eyes on January 1,

perhaps nothing minds if we do that either.

It's just that, rather than an annual Not Good Enough As Is day,

New Year's Eve might be a good time for celebrating these messy, dirty, fat and ridiculously imaginary selves.

Being whatever they enjoy pretending to be.

Unimproved and happily being whatever existence may have gotten

exactly the way it likes

Already.

That might be fun to celebrate every year.

I mean, it would certainly be

new.

"It is only when
The very idea of changing is seen
As false that
One can perceive the changeless."

~Wu Hsin

WORDS AND THE DREAM WORLD

January 4, 2022

Magic:
The art of producing illusions by sleight of hand. Tricks that allow people (such as wizards) to do impossible things by saying special words or performing special actions.

~Merriam-Webster

"Words do not give life; they merely symbolize it. Thus all "explanations" of the universe couched in language are circular, and leave the most essential things unexplained and undefined. The dictionary itself is circular. It defines words in terms of other words."

~Alan Watts

My client tells me they already know what I just said.

They've heard it before. They've read it, discussed it, been following various approaches about it for years, thank you very much.

Yay! This should make things easy for me.

But then somehow, they won't actually do whatever it is I'm asking, or answer whatever it is I asked.

They just want to talk about their experience. They wants to discuss what they know. They want to compare one guy's theoretical concepts to another's and discuss if they agree.

And most most most of all, they want to repeatedly- endlessly- talk about what the triggers and explanations and causes of their situation might be.

They're all about the explanations and causes.

Apparently all this talking*about*stuff is very compelling.

And as they begin to elaborate on how they feel and how, whatever I might happen to be talking about, that's certainly *not it-*

it is clear to me they're in a trance.

A dream world created by constant description rather than actual living.

As if all those words are an incantation.

This is part of what so many folks refer to as "getting it intellectually."

A removal, a distance from actual life, created by walls of words, symbols, images, descriptions, and feels-likes.

Which is why so much of what I do has to involve magic.

Not casting-of-spells magic, of course- no cape or wand involved.

More like the breaking of spells- a sleight of hand where, while people are watching the gloved hand, somehow the other pulls a rabbit out of a hat which also wasn't even noticed before.

Because nothing else can break through all those syllables and descriptions.

Though even when they're deliberately looking, trying, to figure out what I'm up to, in hopes of explaining and discussing even that, they still are unable to see the magic.

Partly because my part in our conversations looks like just ordinary words. Insignificant words, even. Silly, wasting-everyone's-time, nit-picking words.

Turns out that the same language, the same wand, the same pixie dust which puts folks into the dream can also snap them out of it.

Words can cast spells, and words can break them.

Which is lucky for them. Because after all, as everyone knows, if the magician explains the trick, it no longer works.

And they do want it to work or they wouldn't be calling me.

As for you, lovely reader, it is more than a little likely that you too cast your own spell, weave your own dream world, remove yourself from experience with words and descriptions.

Yep even you.

So in celebration of the new year, here's a little giftie for you. Just a small something different, a little game to play with your own hallucinatory world.

Just for fun.

Think of a situation in your life which is not what you want. Something that feels not great.

Whatever it is, with your eyes closed, go to it and put yourself in it as completely as you can.

Immerse.

Hear the sounds, see the colors, smell the smells, touch everything.

Yes of course it's imagination. Perfect. What isn't.

Resist the autopilot urge to describe how you are feeling or if you like what's happening or if you are uncomfortable or if it doesn't count because

you know you are imagining.

Those are words which will immediately remove you from this play and perpetuate your unintentional imagined experience,

Instead of keeping you in our game, which is an on-purpose imagined experience.

So there you are, fully in your scenario.

And then, hold on tight to it. Make the experience stay.

No matter what.

Keep hearing the sounds. Keep seeing the sights. Keep feeling the sensations.

Make every bit of this virtual experience continue.

See if that can be done, without describing, without stating how you feel and think about the situation, without analyzing if this game is doing anything for you.

See if it's possible to stay in this experience without any evaluation or commentary.

See what happens to experience when words don't pin it down.

Abracadabra.

Poof.

Like magic.

"Love sometimes gets tired of speaking sweetly
And wants to rip to shreds all your erroneous notions of truth...

The Beloved sometimes wants to do us a great favor:
Hold us upside down and shake all the nonsense out."

~Hafiz

QUESTIONS OF AWAKENING

January 11, 2022

"Tim buys 40 watermelons. Each watermelon weighs 8 pounds. Tim decides to eat 6 of the watermelons. What is the mass of the sun?"

~Anonymous

"It is easier to produce ten volumes of philosophical writings than to put one principle into practice."

~Leo Tolstoy

My client tells me they already know what I just said.

They've heard it before. They've read it, discussed it, been following various approaches about it for years, thank you very much.

Yay! This should make things easy for me.

But then somehow, they won't actually do whatever it is I'm asking, or answer whatever it is I asked.

They just want to talk about their experience. They wants to discuss what they know. They want to compare one guy's theoretical concepts to another's and discuss if they agree.

And most most most of all, they want to repeatedly- endlessly- talk about what the triggers and explanations and causes of their situation might be.

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See if it's possible to stay in this experience without any evaluation or commentary.

See what happens to experience when words don't pin it down.

Abracadabra.

Poof.

Like magic.

"People, it seems, believe that consciousness
Requires a mind and body. What you are in reality is
Prior to being anything in particular."

~Wu Hsin

"'I am Pure Awareness prior to form!' 'I have no ego!' 'There is no me!' 'I am fully self-realized!' Yes, yes, dear one. Thank you for sharing. Beautiful words."

~Jeff Foster

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BRAIN

January 18, 2022

"Only a human brain can become amazed at its own amazement."

~Michael Markham

"I used to think the brain was the most important organ in the body, until I realized what was telling me that."

~Emo Phillips

"A stroke may be an appropriate metaphor for an experience which in some cases is quite debilitating and takes years to recover from. Ramana Maharshi and U.G. Krishnamurti are well known examples." (this is sarcasm folks)

~Patrick Kenny, Phd

It watches you, you know.

It watches with awareness – awareness of the mind, the ego, the self with all its stories, convictions, and histories. It watches that self with peace and gentle acceptance. Not to mention, bliss.

What are we talking about?

Well, the right hemisphere of the human brain of course. (You thought I meant something else?)

The right side of the brain is where presence, happiness, a sense of unlimited vastness, oneness, and non-individuality live.

"My right brain did not recognize the boundaries of my body. Usually you know where you begin and end. I felt as big as the universe! I was the collective whole, connected to everyone and everything—I was completely fluid."

--Jill Bolte Taylor

The right brain is where the divine is experienced.

And it is quietly aware of what we think of as "ourselves".

"Why is the right hemisphere generally willing to bear silent witness to the errors and confabulations of the left? Could it be the right hemisphere is used to it? The non-speaking hemisphere has known the true state of affairs from a very tender age. The point of view from which you are consciously reading these words may not be the ONLY conscious point of view to be found in your brain. It is one thing to say you are unaware of a vast amount of activity in your brain. It is quite another to say that some of this activity is aware of itself and is watching your every move." --Sam Harris

To seekers of enlightenment or "god consciousness", this might all sound vaguely familiar.

On the other hand, the left hemisphere of the human brain provides what is commonly called the "inner voice," along with language, memory and the ability to figure things out.

The left side manufactures, defends, and inserts into everywhere possible,

The individual self.

The left side houses the sense of self.

Not an *actual* self of course. There's no little person inside that brain. Just a sense of one.

Turns out, if the human mind lives anywhere, it lives in the left side of the brain.

Which is why certain placements of left-brain stroke can shut down the mean voice in the head and leave connection to God, love and bliss in its place, in a heartbeat.

"*I do not see how a non-dual awakening can be anything other than a physiological change in the brain... Symbolic thought is mostly mediated by language, so it is easy to see how shutting down the language faculty by a stroke or by less drastic means could act as a mechanism for plunging the mind into non-dual awareness*."

--Patrick Kenny, Phd

Now to be clear, this is not to say, "Oh yay, gimme a stroke!"

Not least because, in order to have such a grand experience, a stroke has to happen only in exactly-placed centers of the brain.

Otherwise it's just misery and wordless anger and an inability to speak, function, drive, or button your pants.

Most serious left-brain damage leaves people desperately wishing, for the rest of their lives, for their old life back.

Or y'know, dead.

So no, I'm not advising it. Not recommended.

Luckily in healthy, undamaged brains, the two sides are connected and work in harmony all day every day, each doing their respective jobs.

"The notion of a separate organism is clearly an abstraction, as is also its boundary. Underlying all this is unbroken wholeness even though our civilization has developed in such a way as to strongly emphasize the separation into parts."

--David Bohm

So then what is your friendly Mind-Tickler suggesting by this discussion?

Are we saying that self-realization and enlightenment is simply brain stuff? Is consciousness only a brain function?

Considering all the evidence that trees and bacteria and other life forms are also conscious, though they don't have a brain we can point to, maybe we could ask different questions.

Because it may be not that consciousness lives in the brain, but rather, that consciousness, always everywhere unnoticed, expresses itself utilizing the hardware of the brain.

Much like vibrations coming through a theremin, or radio waves coming through a radio, need the hardware in order to be received and heard. Vibrations and waves apparently invisible and not there, until the instrument picks up and plays them.

So what if the enlightenment so many are chasing- the oneness, connection, seeing that the self is fiction, or the bliss and beauty of the vast divine- is in there, right now…

Just waiting for the instrument to play it?

Waiting for the left brain to stop its loud bullying and dominating verbal puffery just for a moment, in order to allow perception of something much quieter, much softer, but already present?

What if enlightenment is always here, and everyone - as long as we're not brain damaged and even if in certain ways we are- carries this availability?

An enlightenment which doesn't have to be accessed, or known, or attained, or kept permanently.

Because it's there already.

Right there in the right brain.

Always.

Just as so many teachers have said, in so many different ways, with the same message, for centuries.

Because if it is the brain which gives access to the divine,

then God is here.

And It

is us.

"No brain, no lotus."

~Judy

DEATH OF A CHILD

January 25, 2022

"The wife is dear because of the love of the Self."

~Brahadaranyaka Upanishad

"Don't let the sky turn without me.
Don't let the moon shine without me.
Don't let the earth spin without me.
Don't go without me."

~Rumi

This weekend, a 13-year old member of my extended family, a beautiful little female person, went to a friend's sleepover, experimented with fentanyl, and died.

13.

Needless to say, her mother is out of her mind with pain and shock, her social media posts- coming one after the other in a torrent- just wails of agony.

The pain of death is extra intense when it's one's child who dies. No matter what age- grown up adult or tiny baby- many, many moms and dads of now-deceased children cannot seem to get over it, waking up with grief, going to bed with grief, often for lifetimes.

It's even harder still when the child's death is due to drugs or suicide (as opposed to cancer or a hurricane for example.)

Because we all know that a parents' job is to see their kids through, to nurture, to guide, to keep safe.

There is a natural, instinctual, responsibility involved.

Animals do this too.

It's only human parents, however, who come to think we're responsible for life and death, for timing, for wellbeing, and even for happiness.

As if consciousness, the universe, god, or existence (Insert whatever favorite name here) has no say about when, and whether, and how, someone's time may be up.

No, apparently we think all of that is on mom and dad.

Drugs or suicide would seem to be preventable if only the parent had done things right.

Making for an extra-hard time for the parent.

As humans amp up naturally-occurring sadness with an extra helping of self reproach and self condemnation.

Oh yes, we get the self involved.

The failure self, the at-fault self, the I-wasn't-there-when-I-should-have-been self, the how-could-I-have-missed-the-signs self.

The mind boomerangs back to that all powerful knower of the future, that holder of life or death in its hands.

That delusional fiction.

"This is my fault. I did something wrong. I should have known better. I am a terrible parent and a terrible person."

We are identified. We exist. We know who and what we are.

The pain tells us.

"I hurt, therefore I am."

And then we might start to notice that we don't really want all that wretched sorrow to end.

Because to feel better when a child is gone feels like we're betraying our love.

And because we don't want to wear the identity of "unloving", so grief is held onto, often for years.

There's even a sense, what with all the personal fault and responsibility involved, that we deserve the misery, as punishment for not keeping the child alive.

So that mourning becomes a punishment for existing.

Now of course not everyone has experienced the death of a child, and if that is the case for you, hopefully that remains so.

But everyone has had someone they love, die. So we've all seen how this works.

"What will I do without them? Who will be my rock? How will I ever get over this?"

That's not about the loved one. That's about The Me.

As always, the Center of All Things.

And the more self is involved and identified, the greater the pain.

How much we hurt comes down to the amount of self involvement.

So if there is a death in our life which was or remains extremely painful, whether it was a child or not,

We can look to the personal. Look to responsibility. Look to identity.

Look to the self.

We can watch it insert itself into life and death and all manner of other places it does not belong.

Attempting to confirm, via continuing pain, that we are.

Because above all else, the self fears being seen to be nothing.

Besides, let's face it, there's no way anyone can turn a situation like a child's death into a Krishnamurti-esque, "I don't mind what happens."

No.

We can expect to hurt. Expect to cry, and miss, and regret and ruminate and feel guilty.

Expect to think about the life a beautiful little girl might have had, but now, won't.

There's no getting around it, no matter how enlightened anyone might be.

Really, who would want that kind of one-note robotic existence, anyway?

But if ever the pain becomes too much, we can know that it has nothing to do with the deceased loved one.

And everything to do with the Me.

Which might enable us to come back to loving, honoring, and celebrating that little life,

which is now complete.

That is the opposite of self-ish.

That is true love.

And nothing is responsible for that love but

Itself.

"The ending of the illusion is the ending of 'you'. That is the death."

~U.G.Krishnamurti

"Death has nothing to do with going away.
The sun sets. The moon sets.
But they are not gone."

~Rumi

A LITTLE GAME FOR YOU

February 1, 2022

"That's what thought does: It separates. It names. It explains. The very thing that helps us survive has also become a form of imprisonment."

~Adyashanti

After the intensity of last week's Mind-Tickler, I thought maybe it would be fun to try something different.

Ready? Let's play a game.

Step 1: Start by noticing and jotting down a few of the "buts" in your life. For example, these are things people have said to me recently:

- I love my husband but I'm not interested in having sex with him.
- I've gotten through this month but I don't know how I'm going to pay my bills next month.
- My family's not too bad right now, but they drive me totally nuts.
- I'm surviving, but I'm depressed all the time.
- My mother is still holding on but it's not looking good.
- I'm okay now but that childhood trauma still affects me.
- I've had an awakening but it didn't last and I want it back.
- I'm not anxious right now but usually it's always here.
- I love cake but it makes me fat.

Make a little list of your own personal "Buts."

You know you've got them; everyone does. The mind just loves those suckers.

As you look at your list, you might begin to notice that the first half of these sentences- the words before the But- are often statements of Okayness. "I'm surviving", "I love my husband," etc.

And then with the word *But*, that okayness is stolen right out from under you.

Instantly. All in one sentence.

The part after the *But* is not-okayness.

Almost as if thought has some kind of quota for okayness. Like it *prefers* the pain and is eager to get back to it.

It lets us have not-pain for about 2 whole seconds.

And then mind says, "Yeah yeah, okay, enough of that," and quickly uses "But" to bring us back to not-okay, and back to hurting.

And then the sentence ends, and it just...*leaves us there*.

Well, that kind of sucks doesn't it?

So, step 2 of our game:

Switch the before-the-But and the after-the-But words.

Examples:

- I'm not interested in having sex with him but I love my husband.
- I don't know how I'm going to pay my bills next month but I've gotten through this month.
- It didn't last and I want it back but I've had an awakening.
- It's not looking good but my mother is still holding on.

Notice a difference?

Same words, just switched in order, and suddenly the same circumstances are less fraught.

It's calmer, gentler.

There's even easier access to gratitude.

That's because words are a description of experience, not actual experience itself. And thoughts are words (or images).

They're symbols, not the real thing.

So without having to change any actual circumstance (because really, good luck with that), it's still possible to shift our experience of any given circumstance….

Just by playing with descriptions of it.

Which means that by trying this easy little word game, we might actually find ourselves...

Hurting less.

Without having to do a thing to actual situations.

Wouldn't it be something to end sentences with peace instead of pain once in a while?

Not because Buts are bad, and not because But's usual focus on pain is bad, and not even because pain is bad.

Just simply because you can. And just simply because it may not be necessary for words to leave us with pain all the time.

Once in a while, maybe we can be allowed to enjoy a different description of this life we're living.

Just for a different experience.

So maybe you'll go for it.

Or not.

Either way, I wish for you more ease, more lightness, more satisfaction, more acceptance.

And of course, happy Butting.

"With our thoughts we make the world."

~Buddha

DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!

February 8, 2022

"The separate self is 'the resistance to what is'. This resistance takes two forms: 1) I want such-and-such to take place in order to be happy, or 2) I don't want what is present and need it to disappear in order to be happy."

~Rupert Spira

"Follow the simple directions."

~Byron Katie

Years ago, I used to take the words, "Don't tell me what to do," very seriously. Because dammit I was a big girl and I knew what was best for me.

But did I though?

LOL

Fast forward to today, where I see a few of my friends, as well as some people around the world, get all worked up over that same idea.

Governments, doctors, teachers, stores, pilots and flight attendants are all telling them what to do.

And by God, it's an outrage.

As if people giving orders is something new and hasn't always been the case.

I mean, ever tried not raising your seat-back to its upright position on a descending flight? Yeah good luck with that.

There are rules. Made by others.

Right or wrong, people have to live with their side's political win or loss, masks or no masks, vaccine or no vaccine, socializing rules, travel restrictions, and let's not forget, all those other fools who do things differently.

They don't like it.

And they think that matters.

Despite unending evidence to the contrary.

After all, there have been rules- liked or not- since Neanderthals shared caves.

There have been rules since preschool about having to wear pants, not hitting one's siblings, eating one's vegetables, going to bed, not talking back, and just generally, doing what one is told.

As a grown up now, it's just more of the same.

Still, the inability to make existence bend to each one's particular will seems to make for a lot of outrage.

As if existence itself is supposed to be run by each individual's personal preferences.

As opposed by the other way around.

Eight billion people having the "right" to have things their way.

That couldn't be a problem, right?

And hey, some of these people might even be into nonduality, and oneness, and no-self.

Well, at least until that no-self is told to do something it doesn't like.

Then, there's most definitely a self, and there are most definitely others, and if those others are too stupid to want the same thing we do, and seem to also think they have the right to what they want? Well, screw them.

This is an odd kind of freedom.

Because let's face it, this has never been a live or let live world. This is never been a, "Go ahead honey, you just do things your way," kind of place.

So when anyone thinks their personal freedoms and their liked-happenings are guaranteed,

they are thinking a little crazy.

This does not make for a peaceful life.

In fact, the more someone experiences themselves as an independent doer, decider, master and knower of what should happen- the more despairing and/or angry they will be.

Petulant, obsessed, irrationally raging.

The intensity of those feelings betraying how off such thinking actually is.

Because no individual has ever had rights of any kind.

Not even the right to be alive. I mean, when existence is done with us, BOOM- Done.

Existence doesn't care what any human wants.

Existence is about the whole, oneness, the big picture.

Existence is about the many, the all, the everything.

So life does what IT wants, and happenings which are not to our liking occur to absolutely everyone.

Constantly. Consistently.

Because the self is thought.

And thought is nothing.

The self is nothing.

These individual selves which feels so very important and so very real,

they're smoke and mirrors.

And the preferences of smoke are nothing.

Smoke has no rights, and no need of rights.

Which is why, for any individual, acceptance of WHAT IS is easier.

Acceptance rather than foot-stomping tantrum feels better, and brings us much closer to that feeling of bliss so many people long to feel.

Calmer. More peaceful.

Because WHAT IS is what we are.

Yes action still gets taken.

Just with more clarity, less privilege, less fury.

Definitely less crazy.

And as an added bonus, we get to see what happens to that habitual strong sense of self,

When we stop pretending it has power and rights it has never had.

Or that it's something more real or solid than it is.

We get the fun and surprise of seeing what actions are moved to happen, when we're not the center of all things.

This is a very different kind of freedom.

Freedom from self-story. Freedom from self-importance. Freedom from self-delusion.

A freedom perhaps far more valuable,

far more worth having,

Than any non-existent preference

Of the non-existent self

to have non-existent rights.

"When there is any form of choice, it indicates a mind that is confused. A mind that sees very clearly has no choice, there is only action."

~J. Krishnamurti

"Freedom does not mean getting to do whatever one wishes. Nor does freedom have to do with 'free will', which is a fantasy. Freedom arises with the understanding that in each moment what is, is, and cannot be different, including whatever 'myself' sees, feels, thinks, or does. In light of that, one may come clean and admit that the 'myself' who chooses is a fiction, a story I have learned to tell myself. In that

admission one may find freedom — not the freedom to 'choose', but the freedom to be."

~Robert Saltzman

"To be free in the world you must be free of the world." Return to your true being and then act from the heart of love."

~Nisargadatta

WORLD SUFFERING

March 15, 2022

Questioner: "The present moment is sometimes unacceptable, unpleasant, or awful."

Eckhart Tolle: "It is as it is."

"The sense that things should be other than they are, is suffering."

~Wayne Liquorman

"Life is suffering."

~Buddha

Since the start of war in Ukraine, many more folks than usual are looking to understand that age-old question...

How can there be so much pain in this world? How can there be so much wrongness, so much suffering?

After all, suffering is bad. Blood, screams, torture- bad. Dead expectant mothers, dead newborns, dead families trying to escape- bad.

A good life does not include pain and most certainly does not include bombs.

We know this. It simply should not be this way.

Why not?

Well, I mean, because we don't like it. Because anguish doesn't feel good.

Y'know, to us.

Turns out, how-things-are-supposed-to-be is determined by each individual human, what we each believe is right and wrong,

And whether we like what's happening.

Don't like= Shouldn't happen. Do like = Yes please, more of that.

We judge what's acceptable and reject whatever isn't liked.

So then there's the unliked happening, as well as unliked feelings ABOUT the happening, and also the vague unspoken sense that we have no business adjudicating right and wrong, even if it's just to ourselves.

All this comes down to a point of view, a perspective, which is entirely human-centric.

And Me-centric. Self-centric.

As in, centered around the self.

There's the self- aka us, the evaluators- and then there's everything else- that which we're evaluating.

Which is outside of us.

Suffering happens to us. Pain is forced on us.

We are continually enduring unwanted, outside-us, happenings.

Confirming that we are separate from, and outside of, experience.

Reified. Distinct. Individual.

Although this is the opposite of, There's only one. This is the opposite of, Allowing everything to be as it is. This is the opposite of, This is it.

Hmmm.

Could it be there is another point of view than the limited human perspective?

Because all we have to do is look around for a half a moment and it starts to seem patently obvious that existence/consciousness/god/awareness/source/the infinite (pick your name of choice) likes it just like this, wants it all, relishes it all, revels in it all.

Including suffering, blood, agony, death, bombs, war, and injustice.

So I wonder what would happen to our solidified likes and dislikes and dread upon seeing today's news, if we could play with BEING those experiences.

What if we could try on being the scream, being the explosion, being the blood and the color red?

What if what we are is literally every pain, every sensation, every sound, every thought and feeling?

Rather than an outsider who is forced to experience unwanted, separate-from-self, happenings. Rather than a solid, separate, feeler, thinker, disapprover, accepter, and evaluator to whom things happen.

Who knows, we might begin to notice how very, very different every experience becomes,

when it's what we are.

We might even discover an as-yet unseen beauty in pain, in screams, in dislike.

Does this change the world?

No.

Does it eliminate suffering (a suffering consciousness has so clearly enjoyed for thousands if not millions of years?)

No.

OK then, does it make us like everything that happens?

No.

But it does make us actually, literally, all that happens.

Which is pretty neat.

And then there's not two.

There's ONLY-ONE.

And we are that one.

And that one

is us.

"All is just as it should be, right now. Not because it is a potential for something better, but because all that is, is divine expression. All appearance is source. All that apparently manifests—the world, the life story, the hypnotic dream of separation, the search for home, is the one appearing as two, the nothing appearing as everything, the absolute appearing as the particular.

We are the dreamers in this dream, the source of the hidden principle is ourselves, and it is fired by our longing to come home."

~Tony Parsons

"The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind happiness
not always being
so very much fun
if you don't mind a touch of hell
now and then
just when everything is fine
because even in heaven
they don't sing
all the time."

~Lawrence Ferlinghetti

UNIQUELY NORMAL?

March 22, 2022

"Society has put before you the ideal of a 'perfect man'. No matter in which culture you were born, you have scriptural doctrines and traditions handed down to you to tell you how to behave. And so you try to control your behavior, to control your thoughts, to be something unnatural."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"The separate something looks for wholeness."

~Tony Parsons

Things come in waves in my work, and lately there's been a wave of folks looking to have sessions because of the word, "Normal."

As in, they're not.

They're not normal because they're socially awkward or lacking confidence or angry all the time. Not normal because they don't have a career, or don't care about the planet, get too jealous, care too much about their looks.

They don't do the right things, feel the right things, say the right things, or want the right things.

As it turns out, even though we all claim to understand that there is no such thing as normal, still, almost everyone feels that there's something not right about ourselves.

Something not good enough, something off, something not typical.

Not to say that we don't enjoy and aren't proud of our unique little quirks, as long as they're not completely unique. As long as our oddities fit in with some liked group- successful business people, for example, or goths, or neurodivergents, Star Wars nerds, artists, addicts, freedom fighters.

Within those groups, our version of a right self desires to be like the others. And not being typical in the preferred group always means, "Wrong."

As in- This Me is wrong. This Me is failed. This Me is broken.

The thing is, no matter what the group, who among them is always confident, never says the wrong thing, is never selfish, never guilty, never fails at work or sports?

No one, that's who.

No one is normal and just like other normals.

Perhaps because life, or existence, or consciousness, is not sitting around wanting 8 billion humans to all be exactly the same.

So it seems there's a reason we say things to ourselves like, "Ok now, act normal."

Because trying to be normal requires acting, faking it, putting on a show.

Which makes sense. Of course the sense of self has to pretend to be something it's not.

Because the self is not anything.

So If we're going to pretend the self is real and constant and a something, then we have no choice but to try to act like those others who seem to have

figured out

how to make nothing into something.

And we also have no choice but to then feel that in-the-background sense that we can't do it, and something isn't right, and we just don't have that whatever-it-is that everyone else seems to have.

Key word being "Seems."

Since after all, their self is no more real than ours.

We might also notice that we can't conclude that we're inherently wrong or not enough, without comparing.

Comparing our lives to ads, tv commercials, books or movies.

All of which are fiction.

Or comparing our lives to that of other people we know, people whom we are certain don't have these problems.

Comparing this not-real self to those not-real selves.

"Normal" requires others.

And it starts to be clear that what we actually yearn for, what we really want to be normal for (because otherwise what good is it), is to be like others so that we can be

part of something. Integral. Included.

By hoping to be normal, we are longing to disappear into wholeness.

Not realizing that we can be distinct individuals and also be included in, absorbed by, the whole.

Like snowflakes, each person unique and beautiful and distinctly itself, while also being an indispensable part of the bigger blanket of snow.

Unique and the same, separate and included, simultaneously.

So. Stay quiet in social situations, or say something that causes others to stare? Included. Yell at neighbors, do drugs, resist therapy? Included. Be afraid to leave the house? Fail at every job ever touched? Walk naked down the street yodeling with spoons swinging from our nipples? Yep-all still included in the whole.

It is impossible to not be part of that vast completeness.

Making even our often-hated wrongness, oddballness, and strangeness,

our regrets, bad feelings, and painful disappointments

Beautiful.

And normal.

And inherently vital

For the completeness of

That all-encompassing blanket.

"I never told you there was anything wrong with you. If I made you, I filled you with passions, limitations, pleasures, feelings, needs, inconsistencies. How can I punish you for being the way you are, if I'm the one who made you? What kind of God would do that?

My beloved, this life is not a test, not a step on the way, not a rehearsal, nor a prelude to paradise. This life is the only thing here and now and it is all you need."

~Baruch de Spinoza, speaking for God

WILL SMITH, DOER

April 5, 2022

"We all saw it! He lost control, it was not right action."

"He needs to do more shadow work."

"He's a thug and an abuser.
"
"That's pure out of control rage and violence. Will Smith lost his mind."

~misc Facebook and Twitter comments

"I could see criticizing Rajneesh if he had free will. And if I had it."

~Michael Markham

This one may make you angry. If so, no problem! Just make yourself NOT angry.
That is today's Mind-Tickle.
❤️

Over the many years, I was fired from several jobs because I said things out-loud that one is not supposed to say, particularly to bosses.

The mouth would not be controlled. The dang thing opened by itself and bad-girl things came out of it, and then the next minute or week or month after that, I was unemployed again.

This inability to control the hole in my face continues to this day.

Which partly may be why the understanding I am not the doer has always come easy for me.

Because it couldn't be more obvious that whatever is in charge of the ol' piehole, it ain't moi.

Fast forward to last week's Oscars, the epitome of putting lipstick and hairspray and tuxedos on the human pig, polishing the image, and presenting an attractive, likable and carefully-curated self to the world.

For a few hours, people who get paid to pretend they're something they're not, show the rest of us how it's done.

Naturally there are rules to be followed to keep the public image looking good.

Number one is to appear like someone who has it All Together.

Whatever that means.

And of course, in daily everyday non-Oscars life, all the rest of us average Joes have to try to follow that same rule too.

And for a moment, Will Smith didn't, or couldn't, follow the rules of behavior.

"He chose violence." "He lost control."

Did he though?

Did he choose what happened? And did he ever have control of the self, in order to lose it?

Or is it more that Smith's supposed command of himself fell away, on its own, when it wanted to, suddenly and without warning, in front of millions of witnesses?

In full replayable view, a man revealed, in a way that can't be denied, that there is No control No control No control.

And the witnesses are outraged.

Aka terrified.

Because if Will Smith can't "act right"- with all the powers of illusion at his disposal, and with all those years of presentation-honing and PR training and therapy and inner work and "knowing himself,"

If in any sudden moment, he can't control things so that everything isn't ruined forever,

what hope does any one of us have of controlling this façade?

How dare Will Smith force the rest of us to see that no human is in charge of mouth, thoughts, feelings, triggers, events, body?

How dare he slip up and reveal how completely powerless these supposed selves have ever and always been?

How terrifyingly clear, that can't-ignore demonstration, of our own impotence, our own pretense, our own illusions.

Damn it Smith, you will pay for forcing us to see what we've spent a lifetime trying to hide from.

Bring on consequences (for him not us), demand for responsibility (his not ours), and insistence that Smith somehow gain control over what will not be controlled.

Bring on our righteous judgement and superior moralizing, as we tell sad stories of our own past trauma and how much of our own pain Smith managed to dredge up and make us feel.

Unwittingly.

But too bad.

Sorry but we will not be made to face our own powerless self.

Though if we're honest, we can sense that our reaction is overblown, full of bloviating self-enhancement and self-perpetuation. We can feel the fear that we also have no power to react any differently to this situation.

Just like will Smith.

But never mind. There's distracting-from-fear drama to enjoy.

So is your friendly Mind-Tickler saying there shouldn't be consequences, or "responsibility", or that any behavior or any evil is ok?

Nah, consequences are what we do here.

We can't help that either.

So sure, consequence away.

Let's just not pretend this has anything to do with Will Smith.

And hopefully the gods will be good to us, and allow us to dream for a while longer- hell maybe forever-

That we have any power at all over what happens.

Or that the whole act of our own lives

couldn't all suddenly go up in smoke

in one mere open-mouthed moment.

Just like WIll Smith's.

"Any time you're angry at anything outside you, question it, because to be angry at a mirror is insane."

~Byron Katie

"There but for the grace of God go I."

~John Bradford

"It could have happened.
It had to happen.
It happened sooner. Later.
Nearer. Farther.
It happened not to you.
You survived because you were the first.
You survived because you were the last.
Because you were alone. Because of people.
Because you turned left. Because you turned right.
Because rain fell. Because a shadow fell.
Because sunny weather prevailed.
Luckily, there was a wood.
Luckily there were no trees.
Luckily there was a rail, a hook, a beam, a brake,
a frame, a bend, a millimeter, a second.
Luckily a straw was floating on the surface.
Thanks to, because, and yet, in spite of.
What would have happened had not a hand, a foot,
by a step, a hairsbreadth
by sheer coincidence.
So you're here? Straight from a moment still ajar?
The net had one eyehole, and you got through it?
There's no end to my wonder, my silence.

Listen
how fast your heart beats in me."

~Wislawa Szymborska

ALLOWING

April 12, 2022

"Saying the ego must surrender- nonsense. Egos don't surrender. That is not what they are here to do. They were never intended to surrender. And they are not going to surrender. Mind is supposed to hold on, it is supposed to think it is a somebody. And it's doing a damn good job."

~Adyashanti

"Ego can't surrender because ego is the thing surrendered. Ego can't awaken because ego is the thing awoken from."

~Jed McKenna

"Watch out for defensiveness. What are you defending? An illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity."

~Eckhart Tolle

In a recent podcast panel I was involved in, the instruction to "Allow everything to be as it is" arose.

As in, yes, do that.

And then someone*(guess who)*asked what "allowing" means, and if it's even possible.

It was just a question. It wouldn't seem to require an angry defense.

And yet suddenly there was yelling.

Uh oh.

Is questioning "allowing" not allowed?

Still, things do seem to happen whether humans allow them or not.

I mean, life isn't sitting around waiting for any person to sign off on it.

So allowing everything to be as it is, that very common meditation instruction, basically pretends we matter and have influence when we don't.

Confirming the self. Validating. Reifying.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

It's just the opposite of what is often wanted by so many who turn to inquiry and meditation.

So this isn't nit-picking wordplay.

Seeing through the self can not happen with language which makes that illusion have nicer feelings, or which verifies its agency and existence.

But ok, no biggie.

And of course, I'm not immune to the charms of trying to let things be as they are. It feels good. Sometimes it feels great. It feels calming to the mind and can bring that lovely floaty buzz.

To the self.

"Happiness is simply to allow everything to be exactly as it is from moment to moment." --Rupert Spira

Allowing is light, allowing is peaceful, allowing is happy. Yay!

Who wouldn't like and want more of that?

The thing is, is that all we're interested in- making the self feel nice?

Is there no interest in seeing through it?

I mean, I'm pretty sure many Mind-Tickler readers want to find, or at least understand, *not-I*.

And if that's the case, then notice what exactly it is that does the allowing.

Because that would be the*I*.

As in, we're asking the *I*to allow things to be as they are, in hopes of finding the *not-I*.

How likely is it that the sense of self actually is interested in finding its own not-realness?

Yep. What could go wrong?

So when we dare ask, "What allows?" we might begin to notice what's at stake.

Because it could be our very existence.

Which feels scary, and dangerous.

It's not*actually*dangerous, though; we're still sitting here just fine. It just *feels*dangerous.

Though we can begin to see how an angry defense of a lifelong point of view starts to make sense.

Because the prime directive is- Maintain and protect the story of Me at all costs.

That image. That façade. That not-real not-thing.

We'll fight for it, dammit!

Hotheaded protection effectively changes the subject.

Diverting from, "Self? What self?" to the much safer and often better-feeling, "Meditation is good; allow everything to be as it is."

Anger is a veil. Better feelings keep us from looking further.

And then we don't have to see the self,

our self, US, Me,

for the vapor that it is.

Because that,

we cannot

allow.

"You don't wake up by perfecting your dream character, you wake up by breaking free of it. There's no truth to the ego, so no degree of mastery over it results in anything true. Putting attention on the false self only reinforces it."

~Jed McKenna

"You realize that you're no one and you've been trying to be someone. You just die and die into the truth of that. Defense and justification keep falling away, and you die into the brilliance of what is real."

~Byron Katie

"It is only when
The very idea of changing is seen
As false that
One can perceive the changeless."

~Wu Hsin

THE POINT IS THIS

April 19, 2022

"The meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves."

~Alan Watts

"Nothing happens next. This is it."

~Zen saying

In your life wanderings, maybe you've personally experienced or encountered the idea that, This is it.

As in, This is all there is.

This still-so-much-work-to-do imperfect life with pain and suffering and not enough safety or health or money or love or enlightenment and far too much fear and sadness and guilt and not knowing what to do.

Ugh.

This better not be it.

And then, ever notice what comes next? After, "This is it?"

"Well what's the point?" is what comes next.

Yay! There it is. My favoritest question. The one that's going to help me afford my yacht.

"What's the point?" as in, "If this is it and I can't get what I want and only what I want, then why be here at all? Why not take my ball and go home?"

If this is it then what's the point of existing, amIright?

It's a tantrum really.

A tantrum of "Don't like!" in answer to, This is it.

Making the timing of the question kind of interesting.

Because as soon as you start to see that there's nothing more than this,

something asks for more,

anyway.

A point. Gimme a point in addition to this.

Meaning This is NOT it.

Nice. Well played.

Conveniently, distractingly, diverting attention from*This is it*to, "This is*it?*"

As in, "Shouldn't there be a better It?"

When you ask this question, you are saying, "Shouldn't the point of life be to have a better-liked life, a better-liked me, and better-liked (by me) others?"

You are saying, "Shouldn't the focus be on the Me- what I am, what I want, what needs improvement, what I do or don't control?"

Keeping attention on the not-enoughness of life.

And keeping the self center-stage and important.

As opposed to being an undistinguished and undistinguishable part of the amorphous, everywhere, equal-opportunity-attention*It*.

Perhaps that's the handy self-serving point of thinking you need a point.

Meanwhile, joy, hardship, terror, love, anger, shame, laughter, and loneliness continue.

Consciousness seems to have no preference for any particular type of experience.

There's no favoring of happy over fear, no preference for contentment over lack.

Which perhaps may be the truer point.

To experience all of it.

Whether liked by some particular human or not.

So perhaps the question might better be, "What isn't the point?"

Since nothing has a point, and everything has a point.

Making needing a point,

pointless.

Luckily, in actuality, no one really cares. No one lies on their deathbed saying, "But I never found the point of life."

Which may be good to remember next time mind starts to pout about not having a point.

So is this all there is?

The only possible answer to that question is YES.

There can be no more Thisness than This.

This is indeed It.

There is no other It.

Existence is pointless, pointed, and all inclusive.

And what's my point?

Oh my friend, surely you know by now

I don't have one.

"This very moment, this very world, this very body is the point. Now. You see? But, if you're seeking something beyond all the time, you never get with it. You're never here...

THIS- the immediate and present experience- is IT, the entire and ultimate point for the existence of a universe.

Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies?"

~Alan Watts

"This is it, kid. This moment is all there is."

~Jacqueline Wood

"You are alive, so be fully alive."

~Wendy Egyoku Nakao

MINDLESS

April 26, 2022

"I am like an idiot, my mind is so empty."

~Lao Tzu

It seems like my mind disappeared today.

Not as in a, "Ooooh looky here, I've transcended the me, I'm not the mind and not the self, yay for me!" kind of way.

No, more like in a, "Hey what's this full cup of previously steaming hot coffee doing here in the freezer?" kind of way.

Most days, for most folks, the body wakes up and the mind takes over on autopilot, floating without much focus through the day's rituals.

Get out of bed. Pee. Brush teeth. Put on pants. Pour clean water in dish for cat. Make coffee, take vitamins, reply to emails, write the Tickler.

Or whatever.

Yet for me today, there has been no auto-pilot. Instead vitamins are being found, untaken, in a lovely tidy pile on the bedroom dresser, and not the kitchen as usual. Cat food sits on the counter, fully prepared but not given to kitty. (For the record, kitty is Not Amused.) Filter is put into the coffee maker, water is poured, but no actual coffee is put in the filter, and there's also no cup for now-heated water to pour into.

Hot, supposed-to-be-coffee water all over the sink and floor? Why yes.

And it's not over yet. I just walked into the kitchen to refill my water glass, came back to my desk with it, and proceeded to try to drink from the still-empty glass.

So auto-pilot-Judy has checked out for a while, replaced by, "What the f*k are you doing" Judy instead.

Which brings us to the question…

What is that?

What is it,that knows to get up when we're still half asleep and get to the bathroom before peeing? What knows to stand up before taking that walk, as opposed to the legs just ambulating while sitting? What ties the shoes, buttons the buttons, keeps the mouth closed when the boss is being stupid, chops the celery without bleeding while thinking about the kids, drives and talks at the same time?

Whatever it is, apparently it takes a nap once in a while (see above.)

Which means it's not likely to be consciousness, that much sought-after, better-than-this experience.

After all, that can't sleep or leave. I mean, how would that work? Where would it go?

So perhaps what's on vacation for me today is indeed some version of the mind, or thinking.

Which I realize some lovely readers might view as cause for celebration. I mean, popular wisdom is that unthinking is better than thinking.

And plenty of spiritual folks think their goal is to transcend thought and get rid of mind entirely.

But then, they're not the ones wiping hot-water that was supposed to be coffee off my kitchen floor.

Let's face it, isn't it the mind, whatever that is, that saves us from daily chaos?

Do we really want to be without thought?

Because even if we do get to go bigger and experience being nothing and no one and become aware that what we are is consciousness itself etc etc etc, don't we still have to know to turn on the oven to make dinner? I mean, that cauliflower casserole ain't gonna cook itself.

We may not be these individual humans actually, but in today's "real" world, there's a benefit and need, at least for now, for keeping the pretense going.

Persons, individuals, self, separation, mind, thought, ego… whatever the name, maybe we might thank that instead of constantly trying to either hatchet it to death or hack into it with all that inquiry and meditation and affirmations and positivity and such.

Not that there's any possibility that we actually can ever succeed and get rid of thinking. Mind has never been anything more than a concept. So despite how it seems,

there's nothing real to lose.

Which means none of this matters. May as well let thought play its little games.

Consciousness certainly does.

After all, consciousness includes everything- mind, thought, actions, situations, feelings- and so there's no problem if tonight's soup ends up in the medicine cabinet, or if we drive into oncoming traffic having blown through a red light.

Mind is not consciousness's one hated, not-included exception.

Actions happen. Existence happens. Thought happens.

Or at least seems to.

So yay for us! We can have it all. We do have it all.

Which means I get to experience nutball Judy, with mind, or with no-mind.

She's very entertaining. I imagine consciousness just adores her wacky self.

I'm going to watch her try to make dinner and feed the cat.

This should be good.

"I wasn't born a fool. It took work to get this way."

~Danny Kaye

CRAZY

May 3, 2022

"If you walk up to a thousand of your closest friends and ask them if they think reality is real, they will probably all agree that reality is, in fact, real, and that you are, in fact, a dipshit."

~Lao Tzu

Online this weekend, where of course conversations are always perfectly sane and rational, someone wrote the not-original-to-them idea that the world doesn't exist and there is nothing but illusion, including us.

This writer was promptly called crazy and psychotic for their trouble.

It seems one thing all humans are experts in, is an idea of what constitutes "crazy."

And for most folks in this obviously-here world, to say that there is no self and nothing real sets off cuckoo alarm bells.

People get agitated when faced with considering that they might not exist.

As if there's a threat to survival if the all-important Me might not be real.

"Ridiculous!" they say, pointing in the direction of their own chest and then yours. "I'm right here, you're right there!" Then they trot out the usual examples of speeding buses and jumping off roofs and seeing with their own eyes, and touching things that obviously could only be felt because they existed, and feelings in the body, and photographs, and other people agreeing, etc etc etc.

A million years ago I worked as a psychologist in an institution for schizophrenics. Those patients saw things that weren't there, while absolutely convinced they were. They held conversations with people that weren't there, pointed to receivers in their heads that weren't there, heard voices that weren't there.

We called them mad and they were put away for it.

That was an opposite kind of insane than this weekend's online commenters were insisting on.

The schizophrenics I worked with were considered crazy for seeing things that weren't there.

This weekend's online folks were saying it's bonkers to not see something (reality and the self) that obviously is there.

So which is it- is it psychotic to see or to not see things that aren't real?

Hmmm.

Yet both versions of "crazy" share a commonality too.

Because when it comes to the, "There is a self and there is a world and if you don't see it you're nuts" conversation,

the proof that is always given- the proof of sanity, reality, existence- always seems to depend on there being a perceiver, perceiving.

As in- we see things. We feel things. We think things.

Just like my former patients.

We're convinced they're real.

Just like my former patients.

See a pen and pick it up. "The pen is real," we say.

Even though that pen exists in our eyeballs and fingertips, not provably outside them.

This is what we call "reality" – those personal perceptions.

And then this individualized sense of actuality requires belief - a belief that human senses and thoughts indicate something other than us, something outside us, something that maintains and continues on without us.

Something which is most certainly there all the time, and is most certainly solid, and most certainly continues to exist even after it's no longer perceived.

Close our eyes, the pen disappears.

We insist it is still there.

Based on our perception and an idea, we are completely certain about what's actual and what's imagined.

There is no other proof.

Turns out, what is used to prove our existence, is our existence.

Yeah that's not at all nuts.

Perhaps you can see that it's completely illogical, batty even, to define existence based on variable and fluctuating human perceptions, thoughts, and experiences.

Perhaps you can see that if that's our version of sane,

If that's where we live,

in that movable, varies-from-person-to-person, depends-on-the-light-and-time-of-day, unsubstantiatable personal fiction-

then reality is not real.

"Reality" is variable, and it depends on us.

In which case, the road to crazy-town is short.

Because we already live there.

"What i thought was unreal now, for me, seems in some ways to be more real than what I think to be real, which seems now to be unreal.

You can't have a universe without mind entering into it. The mind is actually shaping the very thing that is being perceived. Reality gets created through acts of observation."

~Physicist Fred Alan Wolf

"We are nothing but images of images. Reality, including ourselves, is nothing but a thin and fragile veil, beyond which … there is nothing."

~Physicist Carlo Rovelli

"The objects you see are your invention. You create them with a glance and destroy them with a blink. You have worn this virtual reality headset all your life. What happens if you take it off?"

~Donald Hoffman

"All we know of the world is the perceiving of it.
We don't actually know a world, we just know perception.

And how close is perception to the one who knows it? Ask yourself now:
All you know of this room is the seeing of it, yes?
All you know is the experience of seeing.
What does ‘I' mean without a reference to something that might not be ‘I'?
It doesn't mean anything. It's an abstract sound. It means nothing.
Even the ‘I' refers to ‘something' which is different from the ‘not-I'.
So then, here, the mind falls silent.
It cannot describe the nature of reality.
It just doesn't have the language.
It's not the right tool."

~Rupert Spira

"The world doesn't exist and we come to see that clearly. It's all an illusion. It never did exist. There is No One and Nothing. It's literal. Are you ready to live without a world? Are you willing to lose the moon?"

~Byron Katie

MISSING OUT

May 10, 2022

"The walrus and the carpenter were walking close at hand
They wept like anything to see such quantities of sand.
'If this were only cleared away!' they said, 'it would be grand.'"

~Lewis Carrol

It's well into May but it's been cold here on the eastern US, and raining heavily for days. My new little home is dark and raw. I'm bundled up in two sweatshirts and double socks.

Meanwhile my friends in California are posting pictures of themselves smiling in the sun, in shorts or bathing suits, next to a pool or the beach, or on bikes, all golden and glowy and warm.

Sad face. Deprived me is lacking sunshine, warmth and the proper geographic location.

Clearly I am a member of the enormously large contingent of folks who are Missing Out.

We're missing out on friends and parties and relationships, missing out on having children, missing out on having enough money, enough time, enough health, enough enlightenment.

There are billions of Missing-Out Club members, all left out in some way from the whatever-it-is good stuff that happens to others but not us.

Still, I bet even *they* have more warm sun than I do.

I mean, yeah ok sure, I am actually warm and dry here in rainy PA. And looking out my office window, I can see grand old trees, a new fox family, a rabbit, a ground hog. And yes the air smells sweet from all that rain in a way that drought-ridden CA never does.

But never mind that. The gifts of the actual present are nice and all, but something else would sure be better.

Which is really rude, if we think about it. Greedy too.

Like whatever existence provides is inadequate. And like anyone is owed a different life and different circumstances.

Just because we think we want them.

Much like toddlers.

Here is existence providing abundance, and we say "*Pfft. Fine but I want THAT,*"and point to something which is

not here.

Attention goes to the empty space and what is *not* filling it.

So it seems we have been right all along.

We are indeed missing out.

Just not on what we thought.

We're missing out on experiencing the present.

Humans are constantly not noticing the vast abundance of now.

While looking out the window for something else.

Meanwhile, our constant dissatisfaction is perhaps misplaced.

Because while we think it's a house or a family or a bank account which is going to make things better for us,

in actuality, no life circumstance will ever be enough.

Because an individual person can not ever be sufficient and complete.

Not-enoughness is built into the sense of being a separate self.

Lack is a given.

To be human is to be incomplete.

Separate beings can never be whole, can never be every thing.

Separate beings can only be- at best- small, inadequate parts of a bigger whole.

There is a sense that a critical essence of being is missing.

And we know it.

We feel that lack of connection to what is truer, and to what we more truly are.

We feel it.

And then call it "missing out."

Misattributing the cause.

Mistakenly thinking that what's missing is the sun, the fun, the love, or more time on the calendar.

When all that's really wanted is only, and ever,

to get back to the garden.

Which was never actually left.

It ‘s just that the garden lives in the present.

We're in it Now.

And it's ignored.

When all we need to do is notice

What is overflowingly here

And present now

Instead of

what isn't.

"All desire is a longing to come home. We are the dreamers in this dream, The source of the hidden principle is ourselves, and it is fired by our longing to come home."

~Tony Parsons

WHAT I BELIEVE

May 17, 2022

"I don't have something you don't; you believe something I don't."

~Jed McKenna

"Sacred cows make the tastiest hamburger."

~Abbie Hoffman

A dear friend of over 30 years asks me with some frustration, "But what is it you believe? I can't figure it out."

Here he is, no longer knowing where I stand on spiritual things.

And here I am, knowing that his beliefs are all about love and light and positive thinking and gratitude and surrender. In fact he told me so recently, again, for the zillionth time.

So I know his positions. I know what he believes.

And I wish I could agree with him. It would be so much easier. I mean, love and rainbows are wonderful things.

They're as good a dream as any to describe how things are. Even if that viewpoint is not borne out in any version of reality except wishful thinking.

And now my friend patiently waits for me to answer and meet him in Agreement-Land.

Which I can't. So instead, I change the subject.

Because I'm not prepared to lose a friend.

After all, beliefs define us. They tell us who we are, as a person.

Who am I and *What do I believe?* go hand in hand.

"I am the one who believes the world is flat, that politicians kindly work for our best interests, and that lizard people walk among us. And you, you are the one who is wrong. Go stand over there with those other wrong people, and keep your lizard tongue to yourself."

"I belief love is our true nature. I believe we can and must transcend human ego to attain a level of consciousness where awareness is aware of itself at all times."

Beliefs tell us what side we're on, what our position is, where we stand.

All of which are words of location. *Here I am! There you are!*

Beliefs locate the self and provide a sense of realness.

So I get why my friend wanted to know mine. He wanted to place me.

And of course over the years, he's not the only one who has asked me this question. Many of you lovely readers have asked so often, you've given up all hopes for an answer.

Though if you were paying attention, you've found tons of Judy-beliefs waving hello in these 7 years of weekly Mind-Ticklers.

Surprisingly, today for whatever reason, I somehow seem to be in the mood to atone for all that sidestepping.

So here in no particular order are a few random ideas I believe.

They're absolutely useless to absolutely anybody, including me.

But to make them feel special and to pretend they're important, here are also some back-up quotes from much more believable people than moi.

We are nothing.

At most, we're a thought, a sensation, a color, a sound. None of which can actually be literally found. Nothing looking for any of that- no self, no ego, no personality- can be literally found either. What sees that body we think we are? Nothing.

When this is experienced, the sense of self goes poof. Because it has no location. It isn't anywhere.

"We are nothing but images of images. Reality, including ourselves, is nothing but a thin and fragile veil, beyond which … there is nothing." --Carlo Rovelli

"Self-referencing is the mind's tendency to locate itself. When it's realized that there is no self apart from the perceiving, then the tendency to try to find one's Self in any experience, insight, or concept ceases." --Adyashanti

"You are the illusion. If one illusion goes, it is always replaced with another illusion. Why? Because the ending of the illusion is the ending of 'you'. The ending of belief is the ending of 'you'...You think that there is somebody who is thinking your thoughts, somebody who is feeling your feelings. That's the illusion."--U G Krishnamurti

"This is a dream. Because you're really nothing. But this is most incredible nothing. So cheer up! You see?"—Alan Watts

You see? Of course you do.

But-

"Nothingness is really like the nothingness of space, which contains the whole universe. All the sun and the stars and the mountains, and rivers, and

the good men and bad men, and the animals, and insects, and the whole bit. All are contained in void. So out of this void comes everything and You Are IT. What else could You BE?"—Alan Watts

In which case,

We are everything.

We are every experience. We are every thought, every word, every sound, every color. When this is experienced, the sense of self goes poof. Because it has no center. It's everywhere.

"I am that. I am the source of all that is, and so are you... We are nothing, let us be all." --Tony Parsons

"You are revealed to be a presence. Presence is not a self in any conventional sense. It has no shape or form, no age or gender. It is an expression of universal being, the formless substance of existence. Presence is not subject to birth or death; it is not of the world of "things." It is the light and radiance of consciousness in which entire worlds arise and pass away." --Adyashanti

We'll never know what consciousness is.

"Consciousness is that in which all experience appears, with which all experience is known and out of which all experience is made." --Rupert Spira

Ok. And what is "that," exactly?

We can surmise and infer, and that's all. We're not capable of seeing outside our brain, our senses, our conditioned filters; we can only know what the limited apparatus allows us to perceive. Anything outside the apparatus can not be known.

We sure have plenty of beliefs about it though.

"Objective reality is just conscious agents, just points of view. Neurons, brains, space … these are just symbols we use, they're not real. It's not that there's a classical brain that does some quantum magic. It's that there's no brain! Quantum mechanics says that classical objects—including brains—don't exist." -- Donald Hoffman

We are being done, 100%.

We have no idea what does the doing, though there's plenty of seems-like-they-know-something beliefs out there. Whatever it is, it ain't us. We love to take credit for choice and responsibility and free will- all of which reassures us of our supposed realness. Despite the infinite amount of proof that none exists.

"Things happen by themselves. If I say "I'm doing it," I miss the miracle." -- Byron Katie

"There is no separate intelligence weaving a destiny, and no choice functioning at any level. This aliveness is nothing being everything. It's just life happening. It's not happening to anyone. There's a whole set of experiences happening here and they're happening in emptiness … they're happening in free fall. They're just what's happening. All there is is life. All there is is beingness." -- Tony Parsons

We are experience. Only.

"What you are basically, deep deep down, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. And you're ALL that, only you're pretending you're not." –Alan Watts

"There are not two things there, there is not somebody who wants to be free from fear. That somebody who wants to be free from fear, IS the fear." -- U.G. Krishnamurti

"Giraffes are giraffing, trees are treeing, stars are starring, clouds are clouding, rain is raining. And people are peopling. And if you don't understand, look at it again." –Alan Watts

So there you go. A handful of Judy beliefs. You're delighted, no doubt.

And there are more of course. But you're probably ready to get back to your own.

In fact, all this someone-else's-opinions-in-your-face might even have made you good and angry. After all, we like to gather around us only people who believe as we do, excluding others. And you, like my old friend, most likely do not agree with my odd woo-woo viewpoints.

So maybe you're about ready to exclude me at this point.

But of course, no one ever has to agree with me. You have your own soup of beliefs. That's what creates the sense of you. Yours will be different from the belief-soup comprising the sense of me.

Neither of us is right. Because no belief is true.

They're all simply fairy stories we happen to like better than others.

Beliefs are stand-ins, substitutes, consciousness masquerading as a self.

They can change in a flash.

While nothing is actually changed.

Beliefs seem to be necessary though.

Otherwise, poof.

There's nothing left

to have this conversation.

"All supposed knowledge is really belief masquerading as knowledge, and the word for belief masquerading as knowledge is delusion. If everything you think you know is really just belief, and if belief itself

is knowably false, then your entire reality can in no way be distinguished from a dream. There is no truth in the dreamstate because, in truth, there is no dreamstate."

~Jed McKenna

"You'll never wake up from this dream, because you ARE this dream.
And because there is absolutely nothing outside of you, for you to wake up to...
Nothing dreams you, and nothing contains you.
There is no 'outside' of you.
You're existence itself - without any opposite, and without any other.
You're miraculous beyond words."

~John Mirra

THE PERFORMING SELF

May 24, 2022

"I admit it's fun
To smear my face with paint,
Causing ev'ryone
To think I'm what I ain't."

~Oscar Hammerstein

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts."

~William Shakespeare

"Henry Fonda was still throwing up before each stage performance,
even when he was seventy-five. Fear doesn't go away."

~Steven Pressfield

So I'm taking another online painting class. It covers an approach that's new to me. Hence, "class."

There are many professional artists in the class. Their work is spectacular. Of course, the course info is new for them too. But they're not producing sh*te, the way some others are.**cough**

We are supposed to post our work.

I don't want to.

Let's face it, my results suck. No I mean really. I mean ok yes I've been painting most of my life and yes I am good with being in the learner's position.

But still.

The mind's usual evaluation of performance leaps into high gear. It finds mine quite lacking.

How can I put such ridiculousness out there for anyone to see?

Though I do notice that even the pros who are posting magnificence are also making, "It's not very good," apologies. In fact, every one of the class posts has some sort of head-down-toe-digging-into-the-dirt, "I'm sorry, it's awful," commentary.

So, pushing against the urge to hide, I posted. Though I couldn't resist stating the obvious and obligatory, "Ugh" along with it.

And then I got a few compliments.

Oh *HELL* no, now we're going too far.

There's already plenty of pretending going on. Do not make me have to do more.

Do not make me have to smile and say, "You think so? Oh thank you so much!" instead of crawling away snarling. Do not ask me to pretend this shite is good. Instead, let's point out how it sucks. LOOK! Look at this mess!

Do not compliment the self. We hate the self. Do not encourage it.

Especially in performance situations.

And let's face it, every life situation is a performance situation.

Because for the entirety of our lives, humans package the self to try to make it look good.

We try to make it look sexy or kind or confidant. We try to make it look not too visibly crazy or depressed or scared or miserable. In those times when things are good, we try to make it look not too proud, too happy, too "full of ourselves."

The self is concerned with image. It's performative. It's acting. It's hiding. It's pretending.

Always.

We call it performance anxiety for a reason.

All we want is for others to buy the act.

But then life situations keep providing opportunity to risk exposure of the fakery. The sports competition, the speech or concert, having to read our paper in front of the class. Even a smile at someone in the grocery store can be cause for analytical self-review.

Did I pull this off?

And to make it worse, the outcome is never under our control. We may give the concert and get everything right, or miss a few notes despite relentless practice— we don't know, we have to wait and see how it goes, because neither result is in our hands.

Which is why so many people walk around with some level of anxiety.

I mean, here the whole act depends on our presenting a good image, and it turns out we have no control over it.

This can be terrifying.

And the thing is, while thought busily focuses on the content of the show- whether the leg lines are good or if the whoosh of the ball is right- hardly anyone seems to notice what is really being hidden by all that fear of performing badly.

We think it's some version of *I'm messed up and not good enough and have to hide this,* that we're afraid of exposing.

When it's not that at all.

It's exposure of nothing-but-a-concept, pretending to be a real something.

In every moment, we risk being seen- not for what we are, but for what we are not.

Mind tells all of us that it's our non-adequacy and non-goodness which needs to be hidden,

Instead of our non-existence.

This is partly how thought creates reality.

A conveniently painful "reality" which comes with imposter syndrome and a desperation to fix the self so it can fall into line better.

No individual is exempt from this.

Because no matter how much we play-act, humans will always be nothing, faking at being something.

So maybe instead of pretending otherwise, we can *expect* to feel like frauds.

Expect the usual sense of never-enoughness.

Expect to be afraid.

Always.

Maybe at least that, we don't have to hide.

Maybe at least that, we are doing perfectly.

No matter how

we act.

"All fear is the fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

"Whatever the image of yourself, it's a mask and it's hiding emptiness."

~Adyashanti

"Are you willing to risk
Everything, to be
Totally and utterly exposed?
Are you willing to see
How you defraud,
Demean and trivialize
The totality of your being
By relegating it to
This psychosomatic device
Called you?
The ability to discriminate
Between what appears to be and
What-Is is
The mark of the wise..."

~Wu Hsin

TEACHER CONFUSION

May 31, 2022

"The greatest form of ego for an individual is to present himself as a teacher and become a guru."

~Ramana Maharshi

"These teachers and gurus are experts on vision because the blind have declared them so."

~Jed McKenna

"He noticed that his cats seemed to have the quiet mind he wanted. So he started eating cat food and staring at birds outside the window."

~Michael Markham

As some of you know, my foot saga continues and apparently more surgery is needed. Once again I am gathering info to help make decisions for next steps (little pun there, har har.)

The doctors dramatically disagree on what surgery will be right for me.

So it is up to me… me, the one with zero medical training or expertise in this field…

to choose who can help so that I can be done with this situation.

A lot rides on my making the right choice. But I have no idea how to do that.

So I'm forced to depend on factors like if the doctor has a good background, and good reviews, and do they seem like they know what they're doing, do they seem trustworthy?

Though background, reviews and seems-likes are not what does actual surgery. And none of that tells me which of them is right.

Which is why I understand as I watch a new friend navigate the spiritual scene.

He's been following Sadhguru, Osho, Ramana, Ravi Shankar. He knows of Rupert, and Nisargadatta, and Krishnamurti.

These people are famous, known all over the world, with books, reverent quotes, and podcasts. So naturally my friend considers them authorities.

Though if we think about it,what has to happen for that level of fame to happen? How much marketing, hustling, getting the word out? A lot of promotion of the personality has to be done in order to achieve big fame.

Still, my friend wants truth too, and these people claim to have it.

So he's terribly confused.

Because while the many wise ones often use similar words (such as "Self",) they seem to mean very different things.

And quite often they completely contradict each other.

Maybe they mean the same thing, but the language makes it confusing.

Or maybe they don't mean the same thing.

In which case, enlightenment – what it is, how to get it, how you know it, what the results are- is a matter of opinion.

And opinions are not truth.

Opinions, as many of us know, are like a**holes; everyone's got one.

And yet, crazily, who is it up to, to determine whose opinion makes the most sense?

Well that would be the seeker- the one who is looking to supposed experts for guidance- to figure out who's right.

Brilliant set up. Let's leave it up to folks who are trying to learn something, to figure out which teacher to trust, based on… well, nothing useful.

And of course, no one is helping my friend see his blocks to clarity, either.

Because it doesn't serve anyone's purposes for him to see it.

Every answer to every question drags him deeper into gobbledegook.

Hello confusion, depression, personal failure, and anxiety.

All in the name of enlightenment seeking.

Great!

So does this mean no one should turn to anyone else to help them learn something new? Does it mean no one should ever get new ideas from any outside source,read anything, listen to any podcast?

How does anyone know whom to trust and follow?

Well of course I'm not famous, I'm nobody, and what do I know? But unsurprisingly, I do have an opinion (aka a**hole) about this.

And hey, my opinion is worth as much as anyone else's.

So I would say to my friend and to any lovely Mind-Tickler readers who might also be having a similar experience, if you want outside guidance to help with new input and new ideas, fine. Pick a teacher.

But just one.

Not every single "authority" who happens to have access to a microphone and a publisher.

Just so that you don't end up with whiplash.

Choose someone whom you understand.

Choose someone who doesn't require unending financial deposits in order to get access to that great wisdom.

Most important, choose someone who doesn't leave you feeling like a failure. Check how do you feel.

If after the initial lovely AAHHHw ears off, you feel bad about yourself, then not that one.

Choose your personal peace.

May as well. It's not like there's an actual right answer.

Because truth is movable, variable, and dependent on point of view.

So no teacher is right. Whomever you turn to is just as good as the next guy.

And if you're concerned that if you choose wrong, then you'll miss out, allow me to help you with that.

Yes, you will indeed miss out.

You will miss out on someone else's ideas, someone else's choices, someone else's truth, someone else's life.

You'll miss out on pain and self hatred and failure.

What you will not miss out on is your own life, your own experience, your own wisdom.

Besides, really, no one needs enlightenment.

No one.

No one needs feet either.

And that is the great liberating, exhilarating, truth

Which no podcast or guru or foot surgeon

can, or will,

ever provide.

"You are rewarding a teacher poorly if you remain always a pupil."

~Nietzsche

NOT I, SAYS I

June 7, 2022

"It takes a lot of energy to not believe in something that doesn't exist."

~Michael Markham

"As long as you think it is somewhere out
there.....somewhere.....that is where it will appear to be."

~Michael Markham

It seems to have become a semi-annual tradition, these questions turning up in my inbox.

People want to understand the not-I. They want to find the no-I. They want to find the awareness of it.

Where is that sucker? Folks are looking everywhere for it.

Which does raise the question, why? Why would anyone feel it's necessary to understand no-self?

Clearly there's an idea that some-thing can be gotten, if only one can see there's no-thing.

Hmmm ok. Maybe it would help to ask, what wants to know? What gives a darn about this important question?

Well, I'm sorry to report, but that would be the self. It's the self that wants to know.

Self wants to find not-I, by using I to do it.

So naturally, all it ever finds is itself. Over and over and over.

Which makes sense, really. After all, what are the odds that anything would ever truly want to discover its own non-existence?

Slim odds at best.

And then, whoo hoo! Some folks think they do finally get it.

But then they feel depressed, or low, or unmotivated to leave the couch.

Which is often when they start saying things like, "Well, what's the point, if there is no I? Why bother?"

Oh the I feels blue. The I feels worthless, pointless, frustrated, confused.

Yes, it claims to earnestly want to lose itself, and then feels sad when it supposedly succeeds.

Good ol' self, with its many feelings, feeling stuff.

The thing is, feelings come to the one who has, the one who owns, a body.

Making said body-owner the center of everything important.

Which sounds very self-like, not very not-I, to me.

But ok.

And then, even if we perhaps discover that what we are is consciousness experiencing itself through us,

then there's consciousness and also the I doing the experiencing for consciousness.

Meaning there are two things. And surprise! One of those things is the self.

Seems nothing at all can be experienced, except through it.

Making the I very darned important.

As usual.

It seems there is no way to escape the hamster wheel of self. Because it's what's doing the looking.

Y'know, for its not-self. Supposedly.

So perhaps there's nothing to lose by trying something off-wheel.

Such as, take the "er" out.

Take the "er" out of feel-er, think-er, own-er of bodies. Take the "er" out of know-er, and connect-er to awareness.

The "er" assumes a do-er, a self-er, a receiver.

Taking the "er" out, de-centers.

Try on the possibility that there is nothing doing the feeling and thinking and witnessing and connecting.

Why would this matter? Well, if there's no "er", then how can experience happen?What's left, without self-ers?

Happenings. Lots and lots and lots of happenings.

Not knowers of happenings. Not awarenesses of happenings.

Just happenings.

Instead of experience-er of things, it's simply all actual experience.

Thought, sensation, color, sound, understanding. All of it.

Being. Everything.

The I disappears.

And wouldn't it be something if being decentered-everything

more than makes up for any sense of loss some tiny pinpoint speck of the universe which thinks everything depends on its happy existence, might feel.

I mean, it's just possible that being everything is pretty cool,

and that nothing at all misses

that limited, teeny-tiny,

self-important,

pretend-center,

full-of-nothing,

I.

"I've been searching for years for the ideal place. And I've come to the realization that the only way to find it is to be it."

~Alan Watts

"Matter and consciousness exist only as attempts to describe and have no actual reality at all. We are the sun seeking shadows."

~Michael Markham

OFFENDED

June 14, 2022

"If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?"

~Rumi

"People don't like to have their version of reality f**ked with. Try it if you need to get it out of your system, but prepare yourself for unpleasant results."

~Jed McKenna

My acquaintance is offended. How dare I post a laugh about OCD? That's not funny. Do I not know OCD is a serious problem afflicting so many? Do I have no concern for people's pain?

My acquaintance is offended. Do I not know that alcohol jokes are like rape jokes? Have I no sensitivity to all the misery alcohol has created, to people's past and current struggles?

My acquaintance is offended. How does The Mind-Tickler dare joke about COVID, when they just had a family friend die? How can the Tickler make light of their terrible loss?

My acquaintance is offended. How dare I post about an oversize body in a too-small bathing suit? Do I not know the awful lifetime pain of being

overweight? Do I not realize the potential hurt of my words is no better than bullying?

My acquaintance is offended. 30 years they have been on the spiritual path seeking enlightenment, and now I casually stroll off that path into wild grass, laughing. The wrongness - it's infuriating. How dare ignorant me even look at this sacredness?

Ah the tender sensibilities of self. There's no end to its ability to create outrage out of nothing.

I mean, sure, who doesn't enjoy a good laugh? As long as it's not about our situation.

But when it's about the story of this particular life- the Me… well then, it's not funny. It's offensive.

Because it's personal. PERSON-al.

And personal is infuriating.

Truly nothing is more sacred than the Self and its Story and its Past and its Feelings and its Likes.

And its Pain.

We have no problem giggling at the non-pain. But suffering- *our particular* suffering... That requires hushed tones, whimpers, tears.

That requires reverence. Don't even think of doing anything but worshipping at that alter.

Take my pain seriously! DO. NOT. MAKE. LIGHT. OF. MY. GOD.

Which is understandable, really. After all, we have all these years of defining the self by "memories" and the supposed past. "I am the one with the alcoholic dad, the one with the lifetime-laughed-at body, the one who never got enlightenment despite trying so hard."

All these years spent polishing and preserving and honoring this version of *This Is Who I Am*.

Such an investment. A devotion.

And then along comes someone with their own, *different* treasured pain, who is less than reverential about our own carefully preserved narrative.

Well.

It feels like they're laughing at the Me.

The *actual* Me, not just a story of me. The story feels like it's literally what we are.

So of course it's got to be protected.

Perhaps if other people willl just honor it, worship it with us, never take it lightly, never cross a line they don't even know is there…

We can continue thinking our long-held tale of who we are and what happened to us and why it matters, is indeed what we are.

While meanwhile of course, those same folks are busy honoring and protecting their *own* chronicles of who *they* are too.

So no one ever notices that all of us, every single individual, is non-stop hiding that that chronicle is not what we are.

Because let's face it. Nothing real is harmed by the letters F or A or T. Nothing real can prove a long-ago past still exists today, or even ever existed. *(Oh lovely reader, notice if that one ticks you off, thereby proving the point.)*

Nothing real depends on a collection of words and images, occurring to who-knows-what, to prove its existence.

Offense is an excellent diversion for not noticing the unreality of self, the unsolidity of story, the non-threat of non-existence.

Offense keeps the sense of self alive.

This is me and I'm offended.

This veil must not be breached. How dare we even notice it.

And yet, what might be left if it was possible to not identify with a fable? Without diversionary tactics?

I mean, it's *not* possible. We can only ever be a sense, a story. We can only depend on narrative such as, "*And then this happened,*" to know who or what we are.

Still, we can imagine, without all the usual clenched maintenance and protection of pain…

Wow, what a tale. What possibilities for lightness, amusement, inclusion of every happening, every whimsy.

So much more fun than the wary, pinched, careful outrage

we've been honoring so devotedly.

Who knows? We might even notice

how lighthearted this wispy comedy has been

even in every outraged and furious offense,

all along.

"We must constantly protect the illusion of self because if we don't, we aren't."

~Jed McKenna

PLAY DEAD

June 21, 2022

"You can't lose what you are."

~John Troy

"There is no such thing as death at all. What do you think will die? What?"

~U.G. Krishnamurti

The young boy wants to talk about death. Specifically what happens after we die.

Of course, typically young folks are not yet concerned with this subject. But it turns out this boy's grandfather was admitted to the hospital over the weekend, and he's scared and trying to process and figure things out.

Just like every other person who's ever been born.

Humans have been concerned with what happens after death from time immemorial.

We have questions.

Do we go somewhere? Do we linger in some in-between place for a while, or maybe forever? Can we communicate? Do we come back? If so, will we

remember the Me as we currently know it? What happens to our own timeline, our pets, our life, our story? Is death the end of me?

It does seem pretty clear, at least, that the body dies, taking the story of me with it.

We are dismayed. We want reassurance.

So we ask around.

The problem is, the only people that can be asked are not dead. Their answers cannot come from experience.

Which means they are guessing.

No matter how absolutely certain thinkers and philosophers may sound as they discuss heaven, hell, nothingness, or dust- still, they can only imagine. They can only theorize.

Which are words synonymous with, "making stuff up."

Religious and spiritual leaders, ghost-hunters, séance-holders, pragmatists who say nothing comes afterwards but worms – none of them have been there.

Even for people with near-death experiences- the key word is "near." If they are here to answer questions and write books, they are not dead.

None of them knows anymore than we do.

Regardless of how eagerly and hopefully we may cling to their answers.

Which is why, if we're curious about death (and let's face it, who isn't), there's no harm in trying to ask our questions of a different source, a source possibly closer to home.

We can try closing our eyes, beginning to notice that the body is carrying on its business of life, without us. Breath is taken care of, hearing and

heartbeat and blood coursing- all of that is happening without our involvement or direction.

We can leave it to the body to carry on as it will.

And then, simply because why not, we can come right out and ask our deceased family member, our passed-away loved one, our no-longer-here pet- if they're dead.

"Grandma, Fluffy, partner, friend- are you there? Are you dead? Does ANYONE die? Does this body die? Is it what I am? Do I die with it? Will I join you?"

Now your friendly Mind-Tickler understands that this may sound ridiculous. Which is wonderful, isn't it? Ridiculous means there's nothing to lose and quite possibly a good laugh to be gained.

And who couldn't use a good laugh when thinking about the uncertain and often scary subject of death?

So no harm in listening carefully, with stillness, for an answer to each of these silly questions, asked one at a time.

A faint, barely perceptible answer. Maybe even just a sense rather than audible words.

Just for curiosity.

Astonishingly, answers might show up. Answers which are perhaps very different from our usual.

What the hell.

I mean, these folks are dead. Often they've been gone for years.

And yet, somehow… a reply is received.

What's that about? Is it really the loved one answering? How is that possible?

Or is it our own wishful thinking, our own mind just making stuff up?

Or maybe it's be God, or consciousness, or awareness, source, Oneness?

What is it that's answering?

Of course no one knows. There is no way to know.

Any theory is just more imagining, more story-telling, more mind looking for explanations to comfort itself.

All we can can know is that very often, the replies that come are not what we would usually answer.

The same way breath and heartbeat do their own thing, happening without us.

And again, we don't have to take any responses we might hear to, "Are you dead?" the least bit seriously.

We can laugh at our foolishness freely.

Just like it's not necessary to explain or put trust in any replies that might be heard, either.

After all, it's not as if we can put trust in whatever explanations the mind drums up anyway.

It's just that the feeling that often comes from asking those foolish questions and hearing those surprising answers,may also be unexpected.

Because wouldn't it be something if the familiar fear around death dissolved

into an unfamiliar and equally unexpected

peace.

Taking the usually strong sense of self,

and its long-held stories of what we all are,

right along with it.

This might be a different kind of death than we're used to.

Yet still possibly, similarly,

transformative.

"Death is the end of
The illusion that one is mortal because
Death reveals what cannot die."

~Wu Hsin

"Death has nothing to do with going away.
The sun sets
The moon sets
But they are not gone."

~Rumi

BACK TO THE GARDEN

June 28, 2022

"Inside you there's an artist you don't know about...
say yes quickly, if you know, if you've known it from before the
beginning of the Universe."

~Rumi

"There is a community of the spirit.
Join it, and feel the delight
of walking in the noisy street
and being the noise.
Drink all your passion,
and be a disgrace."

~Rumi

As mentioned in a previous Mind-Tickler a few weeks ago, I'm taking an online painting class.

It's a very large group -- 1400 members on Facebook.

Thankfully it's also a very kind and supportive group. Which is a darn good thing.

Because posting our work is required, and post after post after post after post (ok I won't do that 1400 times) is, "OMG it's awful," and "I'm so

embarrassed," and "I almost didn't post this," and "No one 'Likes' my work so it must be because I'm not good."

Yep, 1400*, I'm afraid I'm not good enough* individuals.

Perhaps this class somehow gathered up only 1400 particularly insecure people.

But it's unlikely all the secure ones took some other class. So no.

The funny things is, a significant portion of participants are successful professionals supporting themselves with their painting. They are very used to posting their art online, and the work shown is pretty much always quite beautiful.

But it doesn't matter. Because when it comes to themselves, no one thinks so.

So the word that keeps coming up in class is, "vulnerability."

Hmmm. What is vulnerable, and to what, specifically?There's no literal danger, no literal exposure. What real thing is exposed? What real thing is seen? What is threatened by some comments on social media?

Perhaps insecure is just what humans are.

The self is not secured, apparently.

And my gosh, it's so very confused.

Because it's pretending that paint- or anything humans might produce- is "an extension" of whatever it is we are. It's pretending there's actual exposure of the self in random splatters, or in any other production.

As if what comes out of a paintbrush or keyboard or golf club or tennis racket or anything else- means something about us.

As a person.

So in this painting class, I am repeatedly struck by how fragile the ego is.

How delicate! How frightened of others' thoughts. How desperate to control an image and story, by only posting nice and approved-of things. Making itself tiny and unnoticed.

And then, so quickly, so immediately! It is calmed and soothed and relieved simply by a few compliments and encouraging words.

All it takes to ease "vulnerability" is a few "I love it!" comments.

Weird.

Still, fear keeps making itself known, by folks not showing up to class, or procrastinating (for a class they were eager to take,) or lurking without posting.

It starts to be clear, watching these talented artists, that being a person is terrifying.

Perhaps this is why humans are so often anxious.

Perhaps this is also why we're always seeking – in so many different ways- to connect, meld, and to be included with the Larger-Than-Us.

We're calmed by loving inclusion.

Fear in everyone- painters and non-painters alike- seems (in part) to be terror of not being part of that greater whole.

We're terrified that we might be the one person left out of the vastness, the one loser standing outside. The fear is that we might be the one terrible, outside-the-big-tent, outside-the-garden, exclusion.

Is it just me? Am I the single exception? Am I the one terrible one? is awful in its aloneness.

We want inclusion so as not to feel the individuality and personhood we've spent lifetimes faking.

Even though we know we're not that. Even though we feel what we are.

Which, whatever it may be, is no individual.

Luckily though, no amount of perceived or anticipated failure- no bad painting, no missed tennis shot, no crappy writing-

changes what we are.

Whether it's seen or not, exposed or not, felt or not,

we're already included in the garden.

Because really, where else can we be?

We ARE the garden.

Which means that exposure we so fear

is nothing real.

Just like us.

"Split me,
tear me apart,
fling me across the fabric of space and time.
Make me nothing and from nothing, make me everything."

~Rumi

PERMANENT BLISS

July 5, 2022

"Here's a simple test: If it's soothing or comforting, if it's about peace, love, tranquility, silence or bliss; if it's about a brighter future; if it makes you feel good about yourself, boosts your self-esteem, tells you you're okay, tells you everything's just fine the way it is; if it offers to improve or elevate you; if it raises or alters consciousness; if it combats stress or deepens relaxation, or if it's therapeutic or healing, or if it promises happiness or relief from unhappiness, if it's about any of these things, then it's not about waking up. Then it's about living in the dreamstate, not smashing out of it."

~Jed McKenna

"There is a sensation, and you say that you are depressed or unhappy or blissful, jealous, greedy, envious. This labeling brings into existence the one who is translating this sensation."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

The man asks me about permanent bliss.

As in, he wants it.

Really who can blame him- it's got to be better than the anxiety and depression he's got now.

He's heard from numerous sources this is an attainable goal.

"You can be totally different. You can have an excitement that never swings over to depression. It is the true excitement of finding yourself. Nothing is more exciting than to watch a fear fade from the mind forever. Nothing is more delightful than to possess self-command in a world of chaos. There is no greater inspiration than to know that you have found the true path at last."
—Vernon Howard

"Do you want to know my secret? I don't mind what happens." --J. Krishnamurti

Oh yeah, sounds good.

And it has to be real or there wouldn't be so many sages promising it.

So thanks Vernon and Krishnamurti and all those Rinpoches, Sri Sris, Maharshis, and others, for confusing the heck out of large numbers of people.

While claiming one thing but living another.

Because apparently no one has actually lived the permanent-bliss-filled life.

Even Krishnamurti, despite that famous quote above, did mind what happens, yelling at students for "not getting it", or encouraging others' celibacy while cheating with his dear friend's wife for years and then framing said friend for Krishnamurti's own business problems.

Ok then, Ramana, Nisargadatta, Mooji, Watts? Nope, nope, nope, and nope.

Just humans, reacting and experiencing non-bliss occasionally.

"If we could only see how the 'awakened ones' behave behind the scenes, it might shatter many of our spiritual illusions."
–Jeff Foster

Oh dear. So they're all liars?

Well, many clearly state that the dream of perpetual bliss does not change one's actual life. But mostly folks ignore that or simply don't believe them.

"*People expect some miracle to happen,*
something to drop from Heaven in a flash.
It's nothing of the sort.
Only the notion that you're the body,
that you're this or that, will go, & you remain as you are."
--Ramana Maharshi

They say it flat out.

So maybe we just misunderstand.

Because most seekers think the self, the ego, the person we think of as ourselves, is what attains the bliss. Enlightenment becomes something outside, something other than us, something we *get*.

And we think we're going to be ourselves, the one who gets it.

"*You want to remain as you are, but at the same time, you want to know the Reality. You want to remain in the illusory world and know the Reality. Impossible! Ultimate Reality will not emerge until all body-knowledge has been dissolved.*" *--Ramana*

To not-mind what happens might perhaps be lovely, but we still want it to be Me that does the not-minding.

Which is not possible.

"*When will suffering cease? Not until individuality is lost.*"
--Ramana

Wait, individuality gets lost?

Uh oh.

"*Everybody's searching for something.*
Nobody's searching for nothing."

--Michael Markham

Because we are the bliss, and we are all the other feelings too, and we are every thought and sound and color.

Which means we are fleeting, ephemeral, and not located anywhere.

So there is no *Me*.

No Me to claim attainment of bliss, enlightenment or anything else. No Me to prefer one state over another.

We are all of it. Including bliss, including reaction, including naughty unsage-like behavior.

"There is no self apart from the perceiving. Perceiving is all there is."
--Adyashanti

On the plus side, we get to be it all.

All experiences, experiencing.

Which is why to chase perpetual bliss is to aim small.

Meanwhile, paradoxically, the falling away of the sense of self might sometimes come with a peace, a love, an equanimity.

And also the sense of self, the person and personality, remains in this life and world. As a person we talk with the spouse, hug the kids, work the job.

We continue to be recognizable as ourselves.

And soon enough that self gets annoyed with the neighbor or the government or traffic or the cable company. Soon enough, that self gets afraid or ashamed or guilty.

The self continues to experience every emotion, continues to react to difficult circumstances.

Which is no problem when we are all of that too.

Still, we can count on it- the self is what minds what happens.

So if we really want to not-mind something, we could play with not-minding that we do mind what happens.

"How can the illusory separate self practice something in order to reveal that it is illusory?...The life story that has apparently happened is uniquely and exactly appropriate for each awakening. All is just as it should be, right now. Not because it is a potential for something better, but simply because all that is, is divine expression."
-- Tony Parsons

Because being everything is as not-small as is possible to be.

And who knows? It could turn out that

being all-encompassing divinity

might just be

pretty dang blissful.

EVERYDAY LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

July 12, 2022

"How much 'ego' do you need? Just enough so that you don't step in front of a bus."

~Shunryo Suzuki

"If you didn't have an ego and you were hungry, you would pick up food but not know whose mouth to put it into."

~Twitter user

If you've been following The Mind-Tickler for a while, you know that we approach the traditional bigger-picture isms like consciousness and awareness and enlightenment by entering through the back-door of everyday life.

The hurts, shames, guilts, worries about not enough money or time, self-improvement schemes, lack of proper housekeeping, anger at family or phone company or traffic, etc etc etc. That's what is found in these Ticklers.

You know, all the lowly miserable life-stuff most of us Do Not Want.

Why does the Mind-Tickler enter through the everyday instead of talking only about awareness, you may be asking with fascination?

Well, firstly, because whether it is or isn't true that there is no self, or that this life is a dream or illusion, or that there is or isn't Choice, there is little value in babbling on about any of that ad nauseam, as it seems so many spiritual folks are wont to do.

And second, because the reason most people have any interest in enlightenment, awareness or consciousness to begin with, is to help their daily life feel better. They want to find a way to experience feeling OK no matter what difficult situations happen. They want to not miss out. They want to feel safe, to love, be loved, live better.

All of which happens in the everyday.

And we can only explore reality and consciousness, figure out who we are, have the bolt of lightening, from there.

The human "part" of us, the illusion, the dream character, is what knows and experiences any thing. From right here in the everyday.

So we can't do without it.

And yet, so many seekers pooh-pooh the ordinariness of daily life. They want to overcome, see through, transcend. Only big, grand, whole, blissful expansiveness will do.

You know. You've seen it. "That rage or terror I'm feeling about being fired isn't happening to Me, because there is no me." Or, "Relax- there's no you paying the bills."

Daily experience is considered in-the-way ego, an obstacle standing between the seeker and the sought.

Somehow folks don't notice that there is no enlightenment without the simultaneous dream experience of the everyday self.

After all, without it, there's no way to know they've achieved the oneness they seek, that they've "gotten it."

"Oh I feel bliss." "Oh look I see there's no me." "Oh look, my partner's behavior is no longer upsetting."

Notice how any of this is known. Notice what knows this.

Checking the self's observations and experiences is the only way to know anything.

Because the everydayis where anything exists at all.

Even if it actually doesn't exist. Especially if it actually doesn't exist.

We may be consciousness and not the body, we may be the screen and not the content on it. But that content, that story, is what gives consciousness something to be consciousness OF.

So wholeness includes the nasty neighbor and the cruel illness and delusion and ego and all the persons with all their weird little quirks and preferences.

The everyday is an integral part of the whole and can not be brushed away, disregarded, or discounted.

There is nothing to be enlightened without the self.

Which perhaps is why so many teachers say, "Nothing changes" with realization.

Political views continue, upsets with disagreement or criticism continue, addictions or compulsions continue. No matter how aware of awareness we may be,the trigger-happy, incomplete, not-enough, fruitcake self is still here, long after we see that none of that is what we are.

Maybe it lightens. Maybe it doesn't. Still the sense of Me remains the only vehicle through which we know and experience everything.

This can not stop just by seeing that we are everything.

And either/or- either unseeing self or enlightened non-self- is not how things work.

*Both*and is the way consciousness rolls.

So there's no need to threaten to jump in front of a bus to prove the reality or unreality of the self, or to angrily wonder, if we don't exist, whose arthritis this is. There's no need to do away with thoughts and wacky actions and unpleasant triggers of the sense we've come to know as Me.

There's no need to get awareness or enlightenment or awakening right. Because it's already right and already included.

We are the bus, we are the arthritis, we are the hated feelings and the everyday stress and the horrifying suffering. We are the expansivenses and the bliss and the love.

We are Me and also not-me, self and also not-self.

We get to have it all. We get to be it all.

The everyday is the divine, living right there in the ordinary.

Which is just what the daily appearance of life,

that often unwanted and disliked backdoor,

may show us,

as it opens to something much much larger

than the door itself.

"I am ... the divine expression exactly as I am, right here, right now. You are the divine expression exactly as you are, right here, right now. It is the divine expression, exactly as it is, right here, right now. Nothing, absolutely nothing, needs to be added or taken away. Nothing is more valid or sacred than anything else. No conditions need to be fulfilled. The infinite is not somewhere else waiting for us to become worthy…. There is no need to wait for moments of transformation, to

look for the non-doer, permanent bliss, an egoless state, or a still mind. I don't even have to wait for grace to descend, for I am, you are, it is already the abiding grace."

~Tony Parsons

"The creature who says
'me' and 'mine'
need not bend down in shame---
along with lakes and mountains
the ego is created
and divine."

~Leonard Cohen

BEING SEEN

July 19, 2022

"Whatever the image of yourself, it's a mask and it's hiding emptiness."

~Adyashanti

"It's all make believe, isn't it?"

~Marilyn Monroe

"We were born naked. The rest is drag."

~Ru Paul

Some years ago at a dance I was talking with some friends and a man came up to ask one of us to dance. She turned him down, needing a rest. The man then walked away, ignoring the rest of us. We looked at each other and then someone said, "What are we, invisible?"

Or recently on social media, a woman started a long discussion noting that people get invisible as we age. Hundreds were in agreement, all greatly lamenting being invisible.

Meanwhile this same poster's website is covered with pictures of herself. No invisibility for her, thank you very much.

Then there was my elderly mom in her nursing home, also trying hard not to be invisible. There she was in her eighties, trying to impress all the aged folks in wheelchairs, making sure they thought she was good-looking and well-dressed and fun at dinner, emphasizing her old successes and life achievements with, ahem, embellishments.

How people saw my mother was very important to her right up to her chosen dying day, when she carefully planned the clothes she'd wear when she was found.

Let's face it, as long as we're alive (and maybe even after,) being invisible is bad.

Folks want to be seen.

Dammit, look at me! Look at me being attractive, look at me being smart and knowing things, look at me being cool and unconcerned, look at me being funny, look at me donating "anonymously" and then casually telling people what I did. ("Oh it's nothing; I just like to help people.")

Hey let's take a selfie! And then we'll post it.

Because, y'know, SEEN.

By others.

But only if it's a good picture. Only if we show up good looking, smart, successful, a winner. Only if by seeing us, others will have a good image of us, as our best in their eyes, head, and opinion.

Because look out if we can't make them think the right things about us. Look out if we can't be sure we'll perform well in the concert, can't be sure the boss will be impressed, can't be sure people will view us positively in some social situation.

Eek. Then we're scared. Then we're anxious. Then labels show up like social anxiety or performance anxiety or lack of motivation or agoraphobia or introversion or co-dependence.

Yep. One wrong move and being seen is terrible.

Be seen badly by others and hello depression, hello addiction, hello secrets and hiding and never leaving the house.

Invisibility would be absolutely welcome at that point.

So it becomes imperative- as in, not an option- to attempt to control the narrative about us. We must appear to control how we are seen by others or pay a scary price.

Naturally we work incessantly, compulsively, to make that happen. Constantly putting lipstick on the ol' proverbial pig.

Meanwhile… *Seen, looking good, looking bad, appear, invisible*. Have you noticed these are all visual words?

They're all words denoting image.

And what real thing cares so much about image and how it looks, that well into old age it may still be trying to control how the self is presented to others? What real thing wants that so badly?

Not to mention, what real thing has to work so hard to be seen in the first place? Why isn't it a given? I see a lamp, I see a cat – neither has to bother working to be "seen." Why does it take so much careful human effort and attention- just to appear in someone else's eyeballs?

Could it be because there's nothing more real or substantial available to be?

What we see in the mirror is image; that reflection is not a person. Photos are pictures; they're not a person.

What we call personality, mind or ego is not a person.

Even the body is not a person. It's meat, animated by who knows what.

But hey, at least the body can be seen. Look, there it is. There I am. Right there.

Perhaps this explains why we so often confuse the body with what we are.

I mean, we can't see the darn thing ourselves. We'll never see our own face, our own back, our own nose.

We need others for that. And images- images in mirrors, images in pictures.

Something that can reflect us. To prove we exist.

Otherwise there's no self at all.

We're an image or we're nothing.

Self image becomes key to maintaining the illusion- the hologram- we puff up every day. There's nothing else to back the sense of "me" up.

So yes we do care, and to some degree always will care, what people think about us.

Because we need them to prove us.

So we'll continue to get mad or depressed or scared when someone doesn't think we're wonderful. We'll continue to try to look good in front of the new honey, to not be seen having something in our teeth, to not miss the easy shots on the golf course or have a hole in our pants or say the wrong thing at a party.

Because image is the ball and chain that ties us to the sense of individuality, the sense of being a real and solid person.

Giving a crap what some other thinks about us is part of that tether.

Being seen makes us feel like some thing. It's all we've got.

Even though an image will always be no thing.

Still, that just might be something

worth seeing.

"It sees itself. The reflection in the mirror is only made of mirror."

~Rupert Spira

"Without you, I am nothing at all."

~Michael Markham

"If a mirror ever makes you sad, you should know that it doesn't know you."

~Kabir

FULL POTENTIAL

July 26, 2022

"Everyone is in pain because of their striving to achieve something, but no one realizes it. By no more than this instruction, the fortunate one attains tranquility."

~Ashtavakra Gita

"You don't want to be an ordinary person. That is really the problem. It is the most difficult thing to be an ordinary person. Culture demands you must be something other than what you are. That has created a certain momentum -- a tremendous, powerful movement of thought. That's all that it is. Otherwise it has no use."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"Anything you want to achieve is a self-centered activity."

~J. Krishnamurti

In my work, things often come in waves, and lately there's been a renewed influx of clients whose favorite pain is, "I haven't reached my full potential. I am a failure."

I say "renewed" because waves like this have happened before- people looking for help with their unmet-potential selves.

It's a popular reason to hate ourselves, this potential business.

Not achieved enough, not there yet, may never be, wasted life, wasted glory. *Deserves*-to-suffer Loser.

Good ol' potential.

So often sought, so often strived for-- years, decades, lifetimes-- and yet so rarely attained.

And to be clear, we're talking about not just potential, folks, but *FULL* potential. The *BEST* potential.

Because it's not enough, if we're smart or talented, to only get a nice little job and be an average weekend-enjoying person supporting a family and doing just enough to have an ordinary life.

No. We have to have the whole sparkling enchilada or none of it is good enough.

Ordinary equals failure.

And why? All because some teacher somewhere long ago, or some parent convinced that only greatness will do for their little one, told us we were special and that it was important-

required, even,

to turn talent into something. Grades, money, awards, acclaim, fame, fancy titles.

Something. Get to it.

Never mind that so many kids hear this same story that it's commonplace.

In fact, since almost no one else reaches their Full Potential either, then *not r*eaching that pinnacle is actually the norm. It's as ordinary as breathing.

Y'know- the opposite of special.

Still the non-Full-Achiever suffers, thinking they alone are failing.

There's only one little problem with this set-up for misery.

Potential, full or otherwise, does not exist.

It's a humans-made-it-up concept which helps no one and ruins perfectly good lives.

Potential is a story of how life should be *someday*, an idealized dream, a fantasy future which never actually arrives.

It's the opposite of presence, the opposite of *Be Here Now*, the opposite of *This Is It*.

Instead, Potential is later, it's future, it's imagination. Potential is, "Let's watch a mental movie of a great someday life and then beat ourselves up for not living up to that fiction."

Can you say, "Horror movie," boys and girls?

And the thing is, it's not even our fantasy. It's someone else's, and we, in our innocence, take it on.

Some earnest teacher says, "This is how you're supposed to live, this is what you're capable of, and you must do what you're capable of."

And not knowing we can question whether capability must actually equal requirement, we believe them.

We adopt *their* standard, *their* dream, and then torture ourselves with *our* inadequacy for the rest of time.

Whole lives evaluated and measured against someone else's dream.

Ouch.

The wild thing too, which most of us ordinary non-achievers would have no way of knowing, is that when those rare and special few actually do reach Full Potential-

the Madonnas and Steve Jobs and Kurt Cobains and Simone Biles and Anthony Bourdains and Nobel Prize winners-

Full Potential turns out to be

not enough.

Because look closely and we discover that those "successful" folks are also anxious and inadequate and unhappy. Those same folks also experience depression, despair, thoughts of fraud, thoughts of suicide.

Just like us Joe Schmoes.

Potential is not actually *ever* Full.

It's always empty.

As any fantasy story must be.

It's never enough.

Which is maybe why that inner voice we all experience- the one that insists we shouldn't be happy with this, we shouldn't settle for that, we need to do more, and something is clearly wrong with us for not doing more…

maybe that voice needs to finally just shut the hell up.

Because imagine the same exact life we currently have- achievements or non-achievements, here in this moment-

if that life wasn't evaluated on the basis of getting or reaching some mythical story of Potential.

Imagine the same exact life we currently have, if it was enough as it is.

See now, *that* might be special.

Peaceful.

Full.

Complete.

Who knows?

There just might be potential

In that.

"There is nothing to achieve, there is nowhere to go, there is nothing to be done. We are already divine and we are already perfect - as we are. No improvement is needed, no improvement at all. God never creates anybody imperfect."

~Osho

"Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies?"

~Alan Watts

BAD FEELINGS

August 2, 2022

"There is a sensation in you, and you say that you are depressed or unhappy or blissful, jealous, greedy, envious. This labeling brings into existence the one who is translating this sensation."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"The body is a safe refuge for the sense of 'me.' It is rarely discovered there."

~Rupert Spira

You wake with it in the morning. Or maybe it hits later in the day, or wakes you at night. If you succeed in making it out of bed, you lug it around, trying to force yourself to function.

Intense emotional pain. Depression, anxiety, panic. Sad. Heavy. Unbearable.

The mental loop runs, repeating the same blah blah blah word for word, all day, every day, over and over.

It's irresistible and can't be ignored.

"Feel feel feel. Augh Augh Augh. Feels like this, feels like that. Don't like don't like don't like don't like. Make it stop make it stop make it stop.

Somebody save me!"

No saving comes.

Nothing works, there's no hope, you're obviously in trouble and beyond help or relief, you're a failure a loser broken bad deserving no better. No one has it as bad as you. At least try to hide how messed up you are from others.

Mind's attention constantly on the You. What you feel, what you don't want, what you can't handle, what you think caused it, and most importantly, what you think it means.

Y'know, about you.

Who are you without it? Not a clue.

Which is probably why it hasn't been noticed that that feeling isn't actually there.

It's not in the body.

Yes, there's a sense of it. But that's just another feeling.

And yes it feels like it's in the body, as you point to solar plexus, stomach, head.

But in that case it should show up on an X-ray, an MRI, a CAT scan, light or heat sensor, shouldn't it?

Like every other body-thing does.

And then a surgeon should be able to go in and blessedly-thank-you-lord, scoop that sucker out and remove it. Thank you doctor, thank you!

But no.

This runs-your-life thing which is so intense, so obvious that no one could possibly question its reality because duh, could itbee it's not actually

findable?

Could it be it's an illusion, an idea, a story, an intangible, unprovable concept- which isn't literally there?

Whaaat?

I mean, here's you and everyone else absolutely knowing that Of Course!feeling is in the body and Of Course! the body is where it needs to be dealt with, sat with, transcended, converted, managed, controlled, listened to, honored, respected, felllllllllt, and interpreted.

So it's a lifetime of trying to fix something that isn't where you're looking.

Trying to fix or feel something that is nothing.

And then wondering why you don't succeed.

Feelings aren't feelings. They're thoughts.

Perhaps this is why you want others to validate those feelings, going on and on and on to anyone who happens to stand still near you for more than a minute, endlessly describing how you feel.

Validate. As in make valid. As in, not valid already, it needs to be made valid. By somebody. Anybody.

But nothing real needs to be validated. Your shoes don't need to be validated, the cat doesn't need to be validated. Only feelings and the story of who you are want validation.

Not that the mind has been willing to let you notice any of this. That would mess up its, Of course I exist, look how much I hurt! gig.

The sense of self far prefers to focus on solving the terrible problem of terrible feelings, than to notice that they, and it, don't actually exist anywhere.

Turns out you're not actually defending against feelings. You're defending against the nonexistence of self.

You're just using "feelings" to do that.

So ok fine, blah dee blah blah blah. Who cares? Real or not, it's called Painand it's awful. Real or not, something needs to be done.

Right?

And since that sense that something must be done is very strong, and since you're going to keep trying to do something about it anyway, you may as well try something different for a change.

So here are a couple ways to play with that feeling you love to hate, whether real or illusory.

Just for fun. Not intended to be "The answer" or a miracle cure or even a cure at all.

Since nothing is sick and nothing needs healing.

1- Notice the timing, notice the WHEN.

Notice when your attention is called to a feeling. (The mind will say "It's all the time," but that is not true.) When you notice, "Oh crap I feel terrible," ask yourself, How am I using this situation to know who I am?

And then answer the question.

Because does any feeling- any contraction, any heaviness- make a person bad, a failure, unlovable? It's just a sensation. Does it have the ability to make a person, at all?

2- Ask, "Why does it matter what I feel?"

Take, "I don't like it" off the table, because nothing in the universe, I mean nothing, cares what anybody likes. And take, "It's uncomfortable" off the table too, because that's different wording for just another feeling.

And then notice there's a ton of supposed meaning about who you are- as a person- laid on top of the feeling. Meaning is a concept though, a mind-concoction. Take that off too.

And then see what's left.

It could be that without all that dislike and meaning layered on top, intense feelings become remarkably... less-so. It could be they become just an interesting experience- a heaviness, a flutter, a dark color, a contraction.

Just like that.

Why does it matter if a feeling happens? What cares if a feeling happens on this earth?

Don't settle for "Me, I care." Point to that. If you point to the body, see if skin, bones, blood, nostrils, elbows, heart muscle, care about anything at all, let alone some unfindable emotion.

It could be there's nothing to point to.

So that the question, Why does it matter what I feel? might open surprising new doors, if you're willing.

Which, of course, you may not be.

After all, the devil you know might be preferable to finding out about one you don't.

And that's fine. Just painful.

On the other hand, once don't like and meaning and importance are peeled off from sensation,

a quick and effective noticing

of something other than self

might suddenly happen.

And who knows?

That might feel

Pretty darn good.

"We walk around all day in this virtual reality, physically experiencing what the mind is telling us. If we stop, see through it all, and give it up, what will become of us? It's scary. Everything in the end is a defense against nothingness."

~Adyashanti

"It's absolutely stupid to spend your time doing things you don't like in order to go on doing things you don't like."

~Alan Watts

"Let everything happen to you.
Beauty and terror.
Just keep going.
No feeling is final."

~Rainer Maria Rilke

IT'S LIKE THIS

August 9, 2022

"The menu is not the meal."

~Alan Watts

Lots of recent Mind-Ticklers have dealt with rage, terror, helplessness and surrender, as we've experienced near-constant furious drama and breath-holding adrenaline for a long while here in the US.

So in honor of our latest election, perhaps as a little vacay from all that, it might be nice for some relief from so much foam-at-the-mouth intensity.

Herewith, something smaller, lighter, less fraught. Herewith, something that on initial glance might even seem frivolous.

Which may not mean it is *actually* frivolous, or less worthy of consideration.

After all, The Mind-Tickler is about integrating all the woo-woo understanding and questing so many have been aiming for, with the actual practicalities of everyday human life.

Because really when it comes down to it, what good is all that seeking and realizating and OM-ing and Aha-ing, if it separates us from life? We can't all live non-stop in a cave on a mountaintop. At some point we have to live these lives.

So maybe there's value in a bit of light-weight non-profundity offering a little breathing space while also bringing yummy treats.

So today let's play with language. Specifically, the word "like." Specifically how the word "like" is like, inserted into, like, every where.

See? Frivolous. Hopefully you'll bear with your friendly Mind-Tickler.

Because in languages all over the world *(*see below if you care)*, people are throwing "like" into their sentences willy nilly.

What's up with that?

Of course you have wondered and spent many a sleepless night, like, pondering.

Experts tell us "like" is just filler, a placeholder.

But what do we need filler for? What are we holding a place for?

We're also told it's meaningless. Though if that were the case, then we could just as well substitute other words, like, say, "buzzsaw" or "fruitcake," for just as effective filler as "like."

Fruitcake, why not, buzzsaw, substitute any other word?

No. "Like" it is. Of all the possible words, it has to be "like."

It seems "like" serves some purpose the language folks, like, haven't noticed.

So let's go to the dictionary shall we?

"Like" means many things, all of which can be mighty interesting from a non-dual perspective. For today let's notice that in addition to those, "like" means…

As if, similar to, approximating. "Like" means resembling an object but not being the object. "Like" means nearly the same but not the same.

"Like" indicates exaggeration, approximation of the real, illusion, lie.

Not literal, not true, not real.

Well, look at that.

"Like" is a tell, as in poker.

"I stayed up till, like, 3am" is pretty surely an indicator of exaggeration. "I feel like I can't take it anymore," reveals that I can, in actuality, take it. "It's like, who cares what they think" indicates caring very much what they think. "I need to, like, borrow money" indicates that money is unlikely to be repaid.

"He's not acting like himself," and "I feel like myself again" pretend that the "self" is, like, anything real at all.

The word "like" very often comes just before the as-if, the exaggeration, the not real.

The word "like" points to the not real.

Well. Who knew?

Wouldn't it be something if, all along, we have had an indicator, an exposer of the truth… right there in our everyday sentences, not even bothering to hide…

That we are not a self, we are not a real thing, we are not what we appear to be, and

we have always known it.

Our language shows that this self business is a barely disguised fraud.

Even more amazing, once we pay attention to likes, we discover that we actually speak the truth, in a literal "simply not capable of lying" kind of way,

Always.

We can't lie about the illusion. There is always a tell.

Turns out whatever it is we really are has a ferocious, ever-present insistence on integrity.

So it allows the "like" lie while at the same time, making sure to point to the truth.

"Likes" and "feels likes" and "seems likes" are falsehoods which keep us honest.

We just haven't noticed.

In the spiritual world, we often hear about the limitations of language. But it turns out that it's through that language, through "like" and other words,

that existence actually reveals, actually shows us…

what we know but don't know we know, what we are while pretending to be what we are not.

Through that limiting language. Through those words we brush aside as limited or inadequate or meaningless filler.

All of which is great, like, news.

Because it means we can continue to play-act being individuals, continue to pretend it's possible to act like ourselves, continue to pretend to be, like, an authentic self at all.

While all along, still, also, acknowledging the actual anyway.

Which is, like, really cool.

And which also helps us see that

there's truly nothing else we can actually,

like,

Do.

And that there's truly nothing else that is actually,

like,

frivolous.

**English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, Mandarin, Armenian, Hebrew, Hindi, Bengali, Czech, Filipino, Finnish, Russian, and more.*

THE PAST

August 16, 2022

"We tend to regard ourselves as puppets of the past, driven along by something that is always behind us."

~Alan Watts

"If the past cannot prevent you from being present now, what power does it have?"

~Eckhart Tolle

"Therapists have told patients that, 'The body remembers what the mind forgets,' and that memories and traumas are recorded in cellular DNA. Absolutely no scientific evidence supports these notions."

~Aaron T. Beck, MD

I remember playing at the beach at 5, wearing my cousin's red bathing suit. I remember being bullied. I remember painting with my grandfather, getting a D in every high school class just to piss off my mother, being jealous of my friend's normal family. I remember panic attacks in college, dancing in the school play, singing "O Holy Night" for auditorium. I remember

depression, enlightenment experiences, fights with boyfriends, money fears, triumphs and pats on the back, watching my grandmother bake.

Memories. I've got ‘em. You do too.

We have a past, a history. And the memories to prove it.

Because the past did happen, right? I mean, look, there are even photos- here's a little girl at a beach wearing a red bathing suit.

So what are they, these memories, these provers of reality and past?

Well, they're images. We say, "I was at the beach," and mentally see the beach.

We see it now. Sitting in a chair at home, thinking about the beach.

That is not a real beach. We can't swim there. That's mental pixels.

Even "real" proofs of the past, like photographs or videos, are also images. They are also not the past, not the beach, not our parents, not soldiers, not 1910.

They are stand-ins, indications, representations, of a past.

So where's the real thing?

Oh dear. Maybe we're hallucinating it? I mean, per Mr. Webster: "Hallucinate: to experience a seemingly real perception of something not actually present."

Hmmmm. Apparently all of us are indeed mass-hallucinating and buying into images of something not actually present, as if they are real.

Because the past itself does not exist. It's a picture.

Otherwise, if the past is a real thing, where did it go, where is it now? What does it look like when it shows up for a visit?

It seems humans hallucinate all the time. Even the NOW, that much-vaunted present, is also a hallucination.

But that may be harder to see.

It's just that we don't think of the present as formative. Whereas almost everyone believes the past created us and made us who we are.

Even though whatever happened, whatever we lived through, was only known by colors and shapes appearing in our own eyeballs, sounds falling on our own ears, sensations occurring in our own fingertips.

Experiences depending on us. Happening to us alone. Here in that moment (if at all) and then gone.

Nonexistent unless we perceive it.

And then, from these personal perceptions, we make inferences, meaning, convictions and absolute certainties of reality.

And of ourselves.

So naturally we're going to hold onto a few of those. We're going to call them memories, and the past, and trauma, and life story. We're going to tell those stories as explanations of things happening today.

And we're all going to pretend these past experiences are here still, held in us somewhere, stuck in there forever, directing current life like some kind of miniature mad-person in the forehead, waiting to come out at the most inconvenient times later.

"It was terrible and it made me who I am today." "I still have dreams about my parents- they still affect me today, though they are long gone."

Creating the Me.

Perceptions and memories and histories are how we prove we exist.

As a person.

Humans reify hallucinations in order to verify who we are. A whole person, a whole Me, is built around them.

Because without a past, what's left? What are we?

Could it be nothing?

Oh dear.

Better to put the past on a pedestal, honor it, study it, enshrine it with memory, call it reality, and think it means something.

And then hold on tight.

Never ever release it.

Even if it hurts.

Ok but ugh, for crying out loud, Mind-Tickler, who cares? What good does all this theoretical blather about the past and memory and hallucination do for anyone anyway? No one needs this.

Yes of course that's true.

It's true we have to live in this world. We can't wipe out stories of little girls in red bathing suits.

We can't wipe out Hitler and walks on the moon and radiation and dinosaurs and yesterday and deceased family members.

The illusion must continue. Hallucinations are required. It is necessary to buy in.

There really is no alternative.

It's just that untethering from the usual certainties, even just a little, can bring surprises.

If we are willing to consider that, "Once upon a time" is not reality, never has been what we are, and hasn't necessarily even created what we are-

because really how can any image create a person- especially a person later-

well then who knows? The next realization might be that we're not weighted down by what we think we are, at all.

We might discover that if we're only story, then we're nothing at all.

Which is something a lot of Mind-tickler readers really want to understand.

The past is an imaginary leash.

Unchain from that anchor, with all its trauma, suffering, and heaviness pinning the self down,

And there may be nothing left to hold the usual balloon of Me

From floating free.

Which just might be something,

if we can remember,

to hold onto

Lightly.

"We think that the world is limited and explained by its past. We tend to think that what happened in the past determines what is going to happen next, and we do not see that it is exactly the other way around! What is always the source of the world is the present; the past doesn't explain a thing. The past trails behind the present like the wake of a ship and eventually disappears."

~Alan Watts

"There is neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will be also the present when you experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."

~Ramana Maharshi

"The self cannot be given up as long as
One is self indulgent.
One who is bound to his tendencies,
To his past, his viewpoint,
To his commitments to things in the world,
To his acceptance of life in separation,
Cannot realize,
Cannot recognize."

~Wu Hsin

DON'T KNOW

August 23, 2022

"The mind usually says, 'I know, I know, I know.' But the 'don't-know mind' is where wisdom lives."

~Byron Katie

"You can learn only if you do not know."

~J. Krishnamurti

"Start with 'I don't know.' Why not start where you'll end up anyway?"

~Adyashanti

In my work, usually by the time someone becomes a client, they have already tried every therapy, every inquiry, every meditation and guru. Nothing has worked, and here they are still unmotivated, still anxious, still depressed, riddled with guilt, shame and regret, addicted, unable to get out of bed.

Making my weird what-the-hell-just-happened ways the end of the road for them.

Naturally these folks are desperate for something different, and lucky for us both, they're too exhausted to fight when they encounter it.

Which means new things can and do happen.

At the same time, in any moment there have always been one or two clients who spend their sessions with me fighting and refusing whatever help comes their way.

So as maybe you can imagine, I'm tired.

I'm tired of people begging for help and then arguing with that help when they receive it.

I'm tired of the change-of-subject word "but," as in, Well yes I suppose I do feel better but.

I'm tired of folks honoring and validating feelings they hate, and doing everything possible to keep their pain, because they're absolutely certain that's the right way.

I'm tired of the torrents of words unendingly describing misery, instead of simple answers to simple questions.

Lovely reader, maybe you are also wanting some kind of relief and not finding it.

Maybe you are tired too.

Tired of being certain you know what's right, or what is happening or what you need to do. Tired of believing every voice that tells you who you are, what you should be, what is real, what is important.

So the question is, when is it time for Don't Know to kick in?

I mean, everyone knows an open mind is needed for new info to enter. Nothing can enter a closed door.

When do you give up, when do you give in, when do you surrender to knowing absolutely nothing?

That would be different, wouldn't it?

"I don't know."

"I don't know if I'm right about me or others or politics or climate change. I don't know if this is a bad feeling, even though I think it is. I don't know if there is a self or free will or death. I don't know what consciousness is, I don't know what I am, I don't know what's true, I don't know what should happen.

I don't know anything. I am willing to find out."

Maybe you can feel a bit of spaciousness, a little bit of sigh, just from reading these words.

Because really there's only one way to get some space between yourself and feelings you don't want, yourself and tormenting thoughts, your self and enlightenment (whatever that might be for you.)

And that's an open mind.

Yet oddly, Don't Know might be the one thing you haven't tried.

Ever wonder why not? After all, it seems simple enough, right? What's the big deal in being willing to not know?

Well let's face it, once that door is opened, who knows what will slip out and be lost forever.

Loosen the grip on being certain and, who or what are you? What's left, without, "I know?"

That open escape route might lead to discovering just how gauzy this self-thing actually is.

Maybe it's better to suffer for a lifetime than consider that everything you know about yourself, I mean everything- your life, your body, your nature, your history- has been fiction.

Apparently the sense of self, the sense of who you are, would rather be sure of things and hurt, than to give in to uncertainty, know nothing, and feel better.

In which case, thoughts like, I already know this, this is wrong, this won't work,do the job nicely.

As do miserable feelings like depression, anxiety, and shame.

They protect the self from possible disolution.

Luckily all of that is just more certainty.

Luckily all of that can be answered with Don't Know.

So am I right about any of this? I don't know.

Is there anything of value even when there's a closed stuck door and lots of pain? I don't know.

Am I tired? I don't know.

Do I know anything about anything? I don't know.

And with that, a door opens.

And something breathes.

Something relaxes.

Something lets go.

What is it?

Don't know.

"In the end, nobody can let go of the cliff for us. We have to do it for ourselves."

~Gary Tzu

"It will do you no harm to find yourself ridiculous.
Resign yourself to be the fool you are."

~T.S. Eliot

"To be free is
To know that
One does not know."

~Wu Hsin

DEAD BE DEAD

August 30, 2022

"When you realize what you are now, the issue of death will solve itself."

~Adyashanti

"The body does not know how to discourse or to listen to a discourse ... This which is unmistakably perceivable right where you are, absolutely identifiable yet without form - this is what listens to the discourse."

~Rinzai

"There is no individual entity that has been born. Once it becomes clear that this apparent individual is utterly non-existent, the ideas of death, final release, liberation and enlightenment no longer have any meaning."

~Rupert Spira

"When you die, you die," pronounces the spiritual teacher with great authority.

He sounds quite certain in his proclamation, so I guess he must be right.

Except, that teacher isn't dead. So while he sounds like he knows something, actually he can have no idea.

He doesn't know any more than anyone else about death. He's just got an opinion.

There's only one way this teacher can claim to know such a thing.

A thought came to him.

The thought, When you die, you die, came. On its own, when it wanted to. The teacher did not build, generate, cause, or create this idea.

So that thought is not his property, that thought isn't controlled by him, and isn't his.

Of course there's no reason for this teacher not to believe, When you die you die- why shouldn't he?

We all have to believe something- lots of somethings in fact. And certainly plenty of people believe this particular conviction and agree with him.

Though numbers in agreement only prove the thought doesn't belong to the teacher.

Nothing more than that.

Thought is not biological, not alive. So thought cannot die.

Meat on the other hand does appear to die.

But just like thought, these meaty bodies we call ours do what they want.

They are born when they want, they blink when they want, they poop, sleep, twitch, fart, burp and gurgle when they want. The heart beats without us, hair grows without us, lungs take in air without us, skin heals without us.

Bodies live when they want and when they're done, they die when they want.

We can't stop any of that.

It couldn't be more clear the body is not owned by us, not controlled by us, and that we have no idea what animates, owns, or gives it life.

Whatever does give it life though, we are certain it is affiliated only with one body, trapped inside, too stupid to exit by any of the obvious means.

We believe we are the meat-suit, not independent of it.

So of course we believe that when the meat dies, we go with it.

Key word here being "believe."

Because belief is not fact. Belief is not truth.

Belief is religion, faith, story.

We believe we are the meat and therefore naturally we die.

Ignoring the animator of the body, ignoring the lack of ownership, ignoring the lack of control over the meat.

Only thought can be so certain of nothing.

Lucky for us, we're more likely to be animator, the life in the meat, than the sausage.

Because we can observe the sausage. It does not observe us.

And if we can see it, we can't be it.

So it's highly possible that whatever does own the body, that existingness-

continues on when the body dies.

Since it's not biological, not tangible, and not alive.

That which isn't alive cannot die.

And for those lovely readers who work so hard to "connect" with that consciousness, trying so hard to know consciousness in order to be consciousness,

what exactly are you then, if you're not able to "connect" with it?

Can whatever you actually are not be here unless you connect? How would that work?

What connects or doesn't connect with what is already here?

Know what we are, realize what we are, understand what we are, "connect" with what we are,

or don't.

None of that matters.

It's still what we are.

Which means we're everything.

Every thought, sound, shape, sensation, and person.

Everywhere. Without boundary. Without confinement.

We can follow it out to space and see if it ends.

Vast. Uncontained. Unowned.

Is this more belief?

Of course. Belief is all we've got and all we will ever have.

But at least it doesn't confuse "what we are" with meat.

Because body, with all its quirks and limitations, may indeed die.

That doesn't mean we do.

"(When you die) You can hope your family will examine the evidence and satisfy themselves that the science is sound and that they'll be comforted to know your energy's still around. According to the law of the conservation of energy, not a bit of you is gone; you're just less orderly."

~Physicist Aaron Freeman

"Death is the end of
The illusion that one is mortal because
Death reveals what cannot die."

~Wu Hsin

"I won't die.
I won't go anywhere.
I'll be here.
But don't ask me anything.
I won't answer."

~Maezumi Roshi

FINDING VS SEEKING

September 6, 2022

"Most people don't know what to believe.
They aren't the originators of their own opinions.
They take cues from the conviction of others."

~Eric Jorgensen

"Flush it down the toilet and keep going."

~Jed McKenna

In my world there's a dance champion who teaches dancing through the science of body movement. His favorite discussion is about *proprioception*.

People sign up in droves to take his classes, talking about what a good teacher he is, how amazing his point of view is, and try to memorize his teachings.

Why? They're hoping to catch a bit of what he's got on the dance floor.

No one seems to notice that his students, despite lots of such classes with him, do not improve.

Turns out, what this pro has got can't actually be found in a discussion of the science of body movement.

Turns out, at some point one has to throw out the theories, step out on the floor, and dance. Move, try, experiment.

As opposed to sitting in a classroom talking about dancing. As opposed to quoting others who talk about dancing.

Perhaps this sounds familiar, lovely spiritually-minded readers of enlightenment and understanding?

Shall we join all those nonduality teachers and not-teachers posting 15 or 20 paragraphs about the I, death, true nature, choice, embodiment, and whether reality is real?

Will that ever enable you to spiritually dance?

Shall we have a heated conversation itemizing the differences, rightnesses and wrongnesses of classical Advaita vs Neo Advaita vs Buddhism?

Although let's face it- if I'm involved, that'll be a short conversation, unless you have a lot to say.

Because I frankly don't know the difference between Advaita Vedanta and Neo Advaita.

Basically I frankly, basically, um, don't care.

For me, there's no interest in all those books, youtubes, podcasts out there. There's no interest in quotes by Ramana, Nisargadatta, Krishnamurti, Rupert. (I include them in the Mind-Ticklers because you like them.)

There's no interest in all those predictable, repetitive, and supercilious conversations in Facebook groups about self, free will, consciousness and which Advaita is the right Advaita.

Why would I have any interest in studying or blathering unendingly about someone else's viewpoint?

That would only make sense if I think they have something I don't. Something that I could actually get via learning their words, or repeating

their words.

So my question for you today is, how does studying, reading, talking about someone else's point of view, or even any point of view at all, ever get you what you want?

After all, it can never be your own when you're solidifying an opinion according to others.

And it can never be your own when you're talking about experience rather than being experience.

Though of course I do get that the mind says it wants to understand, and that it doesn't know how to do that on its own. I do get that it wants to select a favorite point of view, latch on for dear life, and know evermore thereafter what's right and true, by leaning on that point of view.

That way you can be guided by rightness. That way you can know what to do. That way you have something to grab onto.

I get the comfort, self-enhancement, and reassurance of thinking you finally have something.

Empty as it is.

But my friends, that's not actually what is being sought, now, is it.

Alright, so let's finally turn to that thought that's most likely been screaming, "But how? How do I do this?"

Here's how.

Answer the questions that arise for you, yourself.

Is there a self? Are you everything, or nothing? Do you die? What is consciousness, what are you, do you have free will? What cares about any of that? What cares if you have free will? What wants to know?

Ask yourself. Answer yourself.

Be very literal, so that mind doesn't play tricks.

See what you find, answering your own questions.

You might be very surprised to discover that answers come.

Though perhaps not the way you expect.

Perhaps not with words. Perhaps not with certainty. Perhaps not with reassurance.

But in their own way.

Differently than you're used to when you lean on others to supply answers.

Maybe showing up simply as a spacious sense of opening or not knowing.

Or not. I don't know what you will find.

And could your answers be (gasp!) wrong?

Notice how much you're afraid of that.

As if being wrong is a disaster that's worth keeping you imprisoned in someone else's theoretical life forever.

Besides, what does wrong even mean? According to whom? Who would decide? Who would know?

Robert, Shiv, Watts, Ramana- not them. They are guessing just like you.

They have no more lock on rightness than you do. No matter how confident they appear, everyone is making it up as they go.

But don't take my word for this either.

Look for yourself to see if anything real cares one whit if you're right or wrong. See if anything real judges rightness at all.

Like Dorothy in OZ, you might discover you're free to find your own way and create your own world.

And then, won't it be fun to see where that only-yours yellow brick road might go.

"All those teachings are for those who think they are something. Know you are nothing and carry on."

~Anonymous

"Explanations
Do not provide
That which is sought."

~Wu Hsin

"Do not seek the answers, you would not be able to live them. Live everything. Live the questions. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing, live along some distant day into the answer."

~Rainer Maria Rilke

REFLECTING YOU

September 13, 2022

"As a very young child I didn't recognize myself in the glass, and neither do I now, when for a moment I regain my lost innocence. In my saner moments I see the man over there, the too-familiar fellow who lives in that other bathroom behind the looking-glass and seemingly spends all his time staring into this bathroom - that small, dull, circumscribed, particularized, aging, and oh-so-vulnerable gazer - as the opposite in every way of my real Self here. I have never been anything but this ageless, measureless, lucid and altogether immaculate Void: it is unthinkable that I could ever have confused that staring wraith over there with what I plainly perceive myself to be here and now and always!"

~Douglas E. Harding

"Flush it down the toilet and keep going."

~Jed McKenna

Do you brush your hair?

What for?

How about putting on pants in summertime?

Why bother?

How about folding the laundry, checking social media to see if people like your posts, answering, "How are you?" with "Good," even when you're not, checking your scores in a golf or tennis or dance competition?

What's any of that for?

It's not for you, that's for sure. If you were the last human on earth, it's unlikely you would care if your underwear was folded.

Pssst- you care what others think.

Y'know, about you.

Now I realize some of you reading this will say, "Nuh unh, not me." I realize it's not cool to admit to caring about this.

And hey, I'm willing to pretend to believe you.

But truth is, you're not cool. You do care.*

As does everyone on this planet, no matter how meditated, enlightened, therapized, or inquiried.

Because humans have to wonder about, play to, and check, what other people think about us.

It's a requirement, not an option.

Maybe not in all circumstances, not about everything, but at least in some.

Maybe you don't care about your hair color and looks, but still try to impress friends with your wild and free lack of caring about hair color and looks. Maybe you're nice when you don't want to be, or show off all your great nondual understandings to others, or feel embarrassed when you trip on the stairs.

Everyone wants to be seen a certain way, and to control what is seen.

There are no exceptions.

It might get a little less intense as the body gets older. But concern for controlling and impacting what others think you never goes away completely.

Why? Because on your own it's not possible to see your actual self.

No one has ever seen their own face or backside. No one has ever seen their actual mind, ego, thoughts, personality.

You can't see your self.

Except through symbols and inferences. Except through images. Except through reflections of the Me in the form of other people's thoughts.

Do they think I'm worthy, do they think I'm lovable, do they think I'm talented, smart, kind, funny, mentally together? Do they see I don't care what anyone thinks?

It's the only way you can know who you are.

It's the only way you can know if you are.

You are dependent on something which is not you, in order to look back and see you.

So sure you'll point to a photo or mirror and say, "That's me."

But photos and thoughts are not a person- they don't eat, sleep, poop.

And you can't be both an image in that mirror and also whatever it's reflecting. There's only one of you.

So those images can't be the self either.

Though they are all you have.

Which perhaps explains why your eyes stay locked on your own face during a Zoom call.

And why it matters that other people think only the right things about you.

Urgently trying to get others to reflect back the liked, carefully curated, image of self you've spent lifetimes building.

Using other peoples' thoughts as a mirror.

In order to see your self.

In order to reassure that you exist.

Now I realize this may sound like woo woo hyperbole, even if I mean it quite literally.

And of course there's no reason you have see any of it my way.

Just point to the real you, something which is not a reflection or image or someone else's thought.

Show me that real thing. Where is it?

Are you pointing vaguely at a body or head? Skin, bones, blood? Which of those is an actual person?

And what animates that collection of body parts? Whatever it is, isn't that more you than a forehead or collar bone? So where is that then?

And what makes it distinctly you? What is it that provides it with personality?

Perhaps it begins to be clear how dependent your existence is on others' thoughts about you.

Because only something not-you can provide reassurance of the existence of I'm right here you.

So to some degree you're always going to care what people think.

That's just how it is.

Does this need to change?

Nah what for?

Fold your underwear or don't, wear wrinkled clothes or don't, get an impressive job or don't, try for approval or don't.

Nothing cares.

And who knows? There may be a surprising freedom in acknowledging that dependence on reflection and so-called other peoples' so-called thoughts, is the only thing that proves us.

There may be a surprising freedom in seeing that no image, thought, or persona can make nothing into something.

Noticing how you try to control other people's thoughts could turn out to be a great doorway into discovering what's real and what isn't.

Which may make that mirrored reflection you're so used to,

reflect back something very different,

TO something very different.

Poof.

**Any annoyance or desire you feel to prove you don't care what people think, actually proves you do care what people think.*

"It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been, was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything—room for grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snowpeaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world."

~Douglas Harding

"Without you, I am nothing at all."

~Michael Markham

COMPARED TO YOU

September 20, 2022

"I can only think seriously of trying to live up to an ideal if I am split in two pieces. There must be a good "I" who is going to improve the bad "me." "I," who has the best intentions, will go to work on wayward "me," and the tussle between the two will very much stress the difference between them. Consequently "I" will feel more separate than ever, and so merely increase the lonely and cut-off feelings which make "me" behave so badly."

~Alan Watts

I'm smarter than you.

Maybe not younger, sweeter, or better looking than you, but definitely smarter.

Although, put me next to a 175 IQ genius, and maybe I'm not even that smart either.

Ah comparisons. Don't you love them?

Yeah maybe not.

Comparing is one of those no-no's we're never supposed to do. Not ever.

Everyone knows comparing is bad.

Yet everyone does it.

A lot.

Because no-no or not, liked or not, we actually need comparison.

It's a key way the mind identifies the individual self.

Though there's no unmoving self-stake in the ground where we're always the best, always the funniest, always the wisest, no matter what is happening or who else is there. We might arrive at the party feeling like hot stuff but all it takes is someone hotter to walk in and boom, down to the bottom of the pile we go.

The self is movable. It changes depending on context.

That thing is whimsical. Downright flimsy.

So naturally we try to make it more solid, more fixed.

Comparing shows us where we stand in the scheme of things. "I'm better than those fools, nowhere near as good as that genius. I'm not as good as that one, not as bad as that..."

Got it!

Located. Placed.

Here I am!

Comparison is the GPS of the self. It literally evaluates the landscape and tells us where we are.

The target moves though, so the map has to be continuously checked and re-checked.

There's no let-up. It can't be turned off.

Because without a location, *where exactly are we?*

Plus, most of the time we come up on the low end, the losing end, of the comparing scale. Since no matter how great we are, there's always someone cuter, more successful, more evolved.

Deficiency can be counted on.

I mean, we might be enlightened but we're no Ramana.

Which means, just for extra fun, a good helping of misery piles on, making it feel pretty crappy to be such a comparative loser.

That pain adds to the sense of solidity of the self.

So to increase the feeling-bad and the solidness, we keep our own lack and inadequacy front and center. "I'm the dumbest person here. Other people don't make these stupid errors."

We become laser-focused on all possible shortcomings and brush aside any compliments or accidental notions of superiority.

Which is why those rare positive self-evaluations, "Hey I did. something nice. I'm a good person!" soon devolve into something like, "Hey don't go thinking too much of yourself! Who do you think you are?"

(Always a good question. Who DO you think you are?)

Of course none of this is seen or admitted. We're not about to broadcast that we're a hologram.

No, appearances must be kept up. We'll pretend we're clever and confidant while standing next to a 17-year old tech start-up wizard. We'll pretend we like what we look like, or that life is actually as good as our carefully constructed presentations are made to appear on Facebook.

Basically every one of us is putting lipstick on a pig and praying nobody realizes.

Especially not the pig.

So when everyone says, "Stop comparing..." Well, that's a lovely dream, but it can't be done.

Enlightened or not, the self must be located.

We have to at least pretend that we know where it is.

Otherwise how do we function in this world? How do we tie our shoes, feed our babies, get out of bed to pee?

Luckily accepting the inevitability of self-location is much easier than trying to stop comparisons.

Because they can't be stopped.

This is the game here. Charades is as good a game as any.

May as well keep the lipstick handy and enjoy making up all the possible presentations.

So many options! So many colors!

Some on the lips. Some on the teeth.

All equally helpful for providing a Me to point to.

A solid Me. A Me who's *right here*.

A Me who, after carefully scanning the room,

Confirms it most definitely exists

and is present

And for sure is wearing the very best lipstick

there.

"Things are as they are. Looking out into the universe at night, we make no comparisons between right and wrong stars, nor between well and badly arranged constellations."

~Alan Watts

"The real being, with no status, is always going in and out through the doors of your face."

~Zen Master Lin Chi

IS THERE MORE?

September 27, 2022

"There is never anything but the present, and if one cannot live there,
one cannot live anywhere."

~Alan Watts

A few years ago, my dad died. Well, I guess "killed himself" is more accurate.

Not because he was depressed, or sick, or in pain- he wasn't. He had a perfectly fine and adequate life.

So then why take this very calm and methodical action?

Because at age 85, my dad felt he had nothing more to "look forward to."

He saw that the present was all that was left. He saw, "There is no point." He saw, "This is it."

And he did not like it.

So he left.

That's what our typical future-driven, improvement oriented, focus on situations can bring a person to.

A great big fat no-thanks to existence as it is.

The fact is, for most folks, the present- unchanged, unfixed, unsmoothed- is simply not enough.

Which is why so many lifetimes are devoted to more, to getting, to improving. We're aiming for the future, striving for goals, trying to attain.

We want better health, we want good things for the kids, we want love, a better job, more sleep. We want a different story of ourselves, to be enlightened, to get unstressful thoughts, or more space between thoughts, or no thoughts at all. We want happier feelings and to be a better person (whatever any of that actually means.)

And then we spend these lives try, try, trying to make all that happen.

Until old age finally brings home the pointlessness of shooing away existence as it is.

With old age we discover that we can no longer pretend there's more more coming. We're forced to come reluctantly face-to-face with this is it.

And yes, some find that sad or depressing. Certainly many reject this What Is business right up to the bitter end.

In fact my dad's seemingly dramatic choice was really just a version of, "Screw this "presence" stuff. Give me something better to at least aim for or I'm taking my ball and leaving."

So today, just because that's what we do here, The Mind-Tickler asks…

Is it possible to enjoy this lifetime without the constant aim towards something, to get something?

Is it possible to enjoy this experience even if we're "not going anywhere?"

If we're willing to consider this, we might discover that old age actually can bring peace and acceptance, exactly because it comes with finally surrendering those lifelong demands over existence.

Turns out, "This is it," is peaceful. Turns out, "There is no point," is an "Ahhh." Turns out, not trying to fight existence, is a relief.

No longer hurling ourselves at the unmovable brick wall actually feels better.

So if "better" is what is wanted, we might make a note of where it hangs out.

And here's the often-unseen thing:

Whether any of this is known or not, understood or not, seen or not…

This is still it.

Whether we ever do come to know that, or whether we continue to think improvement is important, or whether we never stop thinking we need enlightenment, safety or love…

It's still the case that this, this present, is it.

It's all there is. It's all we get.

Liked or not, maybe it's enough.

Maybe even more than enough.

Maybe it's even everything.

I mean....

Can't get more *more* than that.

"Put it this way, if you look at it the success rate of enlightenment is ridiculously low. I mean look at all the teachers who teach mindfulness who are not enlightened, and then the ones that are apparently enlightened, most of them were about to kill themselves or fell over drunk and woke up in oneness.

This can't be taught and it can't be meditated to. Meditation in its own right is a lovely thing. But it's not taking you anywhere because this is it.

And to be fair Buddha did have a bit of a tendency for the sweet sticky rice deserts. Probably after all those years starving himself under the Bodhi tree eating bird shit off leaves. He was not free of his desires.

Enlightenment is a business for people who believe they are someone who can be on a path to becoming better than they are now. And that is painful and it hurts believing that this current moment can be escaped. But this is it kid. This moment is all there is."

~Jacqueline Wood

BEING NO THING

October 4, 2022

"To know is to be.
Being nothing, I am all.
Everything is me."

~Nisargadatta

"Don't go spouting out an answer, just be the answer. Be It."

~Adyashanti

"The only way to find it is to be it."

~Alan Watts

"Verb: words that show an action (sing) or state of being (exist)"

~Merriam Webster

Here at Mind-Tickler headquarters we've talk a lot about no-self.

9 times since 2016 actually, discussing the self we're not.* Much less often about what we *are*.

So today we'll try to balance that just a bit.

Here I am watching my cat clean herself in the window.

Cat, over there. Me, owner and seer of said cat, over here.

I'm definitely not the kitty; she's something other than me. After all, 4 sentences up I call her "my" cat, and one can't be both owner and also the object owned.

Plus, I see her. So I'm not the cat- I'm what's looking at her.

That makes 2 things, me and cat.

And now I begin to notice I'm watching me watch kitty. I'm aware of me being aware of her.

Awareness (thing) looking back at me (thing) from outside (thing).

Wait, how many things is that now?

Judy, cat, outside, watcher, awareness.

Naturally there are plenty more things too- such as consciousness, enlightenment, body, thought, mind, ego, personality, self, feeling.

Things. Objects. Nouns.

Lots of them.

Language has formed the world into nouns since before we were two, forcing us to think in terms of distinct and separate things.

The main building block of mind and understanding and thought is words. And words favor nouns.

So it is very difficult- almost impossible- to see the world any way other than in terms of self, others, and awareness as things.

Because language insists.

"With what am I aware of my experience?" --Anonymous

Can you see that this question as worded makes finding an answer unlikely? "With what" makes awareness a thing. "My experience," creates an owner, and also makes experience a thing owned.

This is partly why so many seekers never come to an actual lived understanding, settling instead for intellectual parroting.

Perhaps, if we really want to get this no-self business, or to see and think differently,

We might consider verbing.

Instead of focusing on, "What sees it?" (2 nouns,)

Or instead of trying to figure out if we're awareness, or the thing that's aware of awareness,

We could instead play with *BEING*.

Being experience rather than experiencing being.

Being experience rather than experience-er.

Being everything.

Literally.

BEing the cat. *BEing,* very literally, both eyeballs and the colors landing on them. *Being* every sound. Being every thought. *Being* every sensation,

feeling, and sense.

Fluid. Uncentered. Changing one millisecond after the other.

Of course there's no guidebook for doing this, no method, no rule. And it's certainly not going to come naturally.

Language won't let it.

So this is entirely just for fun. None of it is serious or important.

We can notice though, that we're either verbing or we're not.

Because if we're verbing, then we're everything.

And *everything* makes for no exceptions.

No "outside of me" ownership. And no owner at all.

In fact, no thing at all.

Not even one.

And then it might be fun to see - what happens to the precious and feels-so-real self exactly, when it's not a thing?

That seemingly strong sense of a *Me* might just dissipate, dissolving into the everything it is.

Ok fine. Yeah yeah. Why bother?

And of course there's absolutely no reason or need. Ever.

It's just that nouning hurts.

Verbing cannot.

Because it involves no thing.

So there's no thing to lose.

No thing to gain.

And no thing

to be

any thing more

than everything.

"Only words and conventions
can isolate us from the entirely
undefinable something
which is everything."

~Alan Watts

"The observer spends a lifetime
In conflict with the observed.
This is resolved when
The observer is also the observed and
The two dissolve into the observing."

~Wu Hsin

"Make me nothing and from nothing, make me everything."

~Rumi

MANIFEST THIS

October 11, 2022

"Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."

~Garth Brooks

Participant: "What about manifesting things in your life?"

Byron Katie: "Why would I cheat myself? Why would I think so small?"

"The secret to happiness is none of your damn business."

~God, on Twitter

My lovely friend is worried. Well, ok yeah, more like terrified.

Because for years she's been convinced she won't have enough money later in life.

She envisions retiring with nothing, just the shopping cart and mattress under the bridge, or the dank dingy one room apartment.

I mean, she's getting by ok now.

But there's no comfort in that, because she's focused on a very deficient later, and flooding her current life with an abundance of fear.

Which is why she's trying very intently to manifest future money. Visualizing incoming checks, big bank balances, pension with plenty of commas. Reciting positive affirmations to cheer herself on.

Trying to make her thoughts align with a positive vibration and create an abundance mindset.

Whatever any of that even is.

Now of course this person is not alone in her efforts and beliefs. Manifesting is a very popular idea. Many many folks, maybe even you too, believe that if we just think right, we can have everything we want.

And that every like and preference can, and should, be manifested.

By, y'know, us.

And of course it's easy to see the great appeal of that kind of personal human power.

After all, the self loves to pretend all happenings in the universe revolve around it.

It's just that maybe we're a little confused.

First, because how can anyone get an abundance mindset by starting from a mindset of, "not enough?"

Which is where all manifesting starts from. Lack and not-enough is what creates the need for manifesting in the first place.

Yet abundance means more than enough. Needing more is the opposite of that.

And if there's more than enough, then there's already abundance. So why would anyone ever need to manifest?

The whole premise makes no sense.

Not to mention, what's listening? What's interested in noticing humans' properly-worded requests, and based on them, meting out rewards and occasionally granting plenty of money and love and other enoughnesses?

Energy? The Universe? God? Life? Existence?

Whatever any of those things are, are we saying it's helpless in the face of the magnetizing power of human thoughts? Are we saying that what it wants doesn't matter? Are we saying that the universe or God doesn't already have things just the way it likes?

Does the universe needs humans to visualize properly so it knows what to do next?

Does existence hear our properly manifested thought and say, "Oh yes that's right, I forgot about giving Judy her millions of dollars. I can't resist the attraction of her abundance mentality. Silly me, let me correct that error right now."

Apparently we believe that if life or the universe has a different preference than ours, it's in error.

And in that case, our preference should take priority.

I mean here's the universe, energy, existence, doing its thing, minding its business as it has done for over 3 billion years,

and then, in the last 300,000 years, along come humans with the idea that more money or more love or less suffering would make things better.

And we- mighty puppet masters all- think the universe says, "Oops! My bad."

Um, what?

Besides, how have we not noticed that trying to control the attractions of the universe brings lots what we don't want - unease, worry, deprivation, guilt, sadness, anxiety.

Ugh.

So if abundance is what is needed, why not start with noticing how abundant life is, already?

Because how can more come to anyone who disregards the incredible richness of what has already shown up?

It could just be that, with a focus on what's here instead of what isn't, we might discover that despite what we think,

there is no lack.

No need for more.

No need for more money, safety, love, peace, enlightenment.

We might discover the huge relief of already-here abundance.

We might discover the huge relief of not being responsible, or at fault, for what existence is already providing.

We might discover a trust, a surrender, a peace in the enormity of what is here.

Which just might turn out to be more abundance

than we will ever know

what to do with.

"If you take your hands off the tiller, the boat will steer itself and do a vastly better job of it than you ever would. If there were a secret to

happiness in life, i would say that was it."

~Jed McKenna

Questioner: "What is the secret of your serenity?">

Master: "Wholehearted cooperation with the inevitable."

~Anthony de Mello

"The real secret is to love what is."

~Byron Katie

SCARY VOID

October 18, 2022

"Nirvāna is not annihilation. It's not disappearance into a sort of undifferentiated void."

~Alan Watts

"You can only be afraid of what you think you know."

~J. Krishnamurti

"It's always fear beneath the surface, no matter how it manifests. People don't like to have their version of reality f**ked with. Try it if you still need to get it out of your system, but prepare yourself for unpleasant results."

~Jed McKenna

Years ago while sitting on my bed, I had what some call an awakening experience. This turned out later to be one of several, though I didn't know that then.

I wasn't looking for enlightenment, in fact couldn't care less about making such a thing happen.

Regardless here it was- a sudden knowing that Judy was a hologram. A sudden watching the lifetime movie of creating, projecting and protecting that "Judy" image. Knowing that an image is not a person.

Seeing that Judy had never been more than a dreaming, with no location, no center. Seeing that even what appeared to be her body, and others' bodies, and the cat, and the bed, were false concepts.

If she was anything, she was Experiencing, solidified into an experience-er.

All of which literally somehow knocked Judy's non-body right off the bed.

And from the floor, can you guess came next?

Do you imagine it was blissful, peaceful, transcendent?

No.

What came next was fear.

Well, terror, to be more accurate. Big fat unreasoning terror.

After all, I had been a person, a self, with a history, and preferences, and body. I knew who I was.

Ok sure, I didn't like her much, but at least I had the reassurance of knowing who I was dealing with.

And then an unasked-for flash seemed to turn a clear obvious Me into a clear obvious Naught.

Void. Empty. Nothing.

No self. No me. No Judy.

Gone.

Something that once was, something I could count on with familiarity- good ol' ME, MY self- somehow now wasn't.

Eek.

In the years since that time, I've discovered that it's actually very common for folks to be terrified after getting a glimpse that they're not what they thought.

I mean, are we supposed to enjoy being here and then suddenly gone and unfindable? Are we supposed to enjoy that huge new lack where there wasn't lack before?

Though on closer scrutiny, the whole idea is kind of wacky really.

First, because we're saying the self is so powerful that it can - and does- make itself disappear just by seeing something.

And second, yes we might mourn the loss of illusion, loss of importance, loss of being center of all things.

But since we've just seen that none of that was ever there to begin with, what exactly has gone missing?

What is afraid of its loss? What is being mourned, and what is mourning?

How nice that fear happens just as we are supposedly being set free of the false burden of self.

Turns out fear is an effective subject-changer, calling attention away from, "Oh!"and sending it right back to, "I'm the one right here, feeling stuff."

Conveniently resolidifying the sense of self, and bringing us back to the familiar, habitual Me.

Reifying the sense of Me once again.

So the panic of, "Oh no what happens to Me now?" simply continues the business-as-usual importance of self.

Funnily enough. (Are you laughing yet?)

Because of course we're also still here.

Same bed, same past, same personality, same likes and dislikes.

The story of Me carries on.

Nothing is gone.

I mean, where would it go?

Besides, what can be lost if it was never there to begin with?

Not to mention, if we know there's a void, then there's a Me that knows this.

In which case, we're not gone, and therefore, there's no void.

Y'know?

Meanwhile, whatever we are,

whatever that is,

it continues to be what it has always been.

Regardless of whether we suddenly "see through it" or not.

Emptiness is not empty.

There is no void.

Nothingness is not possible.

Because there has to be something, in order for there to be nothing.

Now of course, we're free to be afraid. And of course fear is fine.

It's just perhaps unnecessary, as we see the possible ploy of distraction.

Because even if there is indeed no self, and never has been,

whatever remains is

not nothing.

It might even be the opposite of nothing.

It might even be

quite something.

"That which is unreal never is, and that which is real never is not."

~Krishna

"We are nothing, let us be all."

~Tony Parsons

"Since in reality all is void,
Whereon can the dust fall?"

~Hui Neng

"Being nothing, I am all. Everything is me, everything is mine. 'No me No you! It's all a concept!'"

~Nisargadatta

DEATH AND YOUR SELF

November 15, 2022

"I am not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

~Woody Allen

"It's me. I. I'm the problem, it's me."

~Taylor Swift

"It will happen to all of us that one day you'll be tapped on the shoulder and told - not just that the party's over - but worse: the party's going on, but you have to leave; and is going on without you. That's the reflection, I think, that most upsets people about their demise."

~Christopher Hitchens

"It's always fear beneath the surface, no matter how it manifests. People don't like to have their version of reality f**ked with. Try it if

you still need to get it out of your system, but prepare yourself for unpleasant results."

~Jed McKenna

As you may know, I put my little cat to sleep last week. *(Thank you friends, for your comfort and kindness.)*

You'd think I'd have been ready. After all, she was 18, and it had been almost 3 years of pills, fluids, and periodic emergency trips to the vet hospital.

So it shouldn't have been much of a surprise when the time came.

And yet adjusting has been rough.

So I've been comforting myself with a useless, time-filling mental exploration of grief.

Because as Ramana said, "Why mourn the dead? They are free from bondage."

Yet we *do* mourn the dead.

So what's that all about?

And what brings tears, when there were none a minute ago?

Well, first- difference. A whole lot is suddenly different when someone dies.

For me it's been very weird after 37 years of living with pets, to no longer need to prepare food or clean water or clean the litterbox. It's been very weird to no longer need to set alarms for medications, or to have kitty heating pads all over the house, or to keep the house warmer than I prefer.

As it has been noticed, each of those changes, each of those differences, has announced itself with tears.

Oh wait. Look at that.

None of those tear-bringing differences have to do with the cat.

They're all about Judy.

No kitty (for me) to welcome and cuddle when I come home, no movement in the house (for me) to notice, no sounds (for me) to hear, no need (for me) to interpret the stoic and mysterious little ways of another life.

Could it be mourning has very little to do with the one that has died, and everything to do with the one that's presumably left behind?

Surely there's more to grief than that.

After all, there's also meaning.

Y'know, about me.

"Did I let them down? Was I there for them? Was I kind enough, loving enough, supportive enough? Does this mean I am selfish? Does this mean I'm a bad person?"

Once again, none of that is about the one who died.

It may look like grief for another. But it's all actually about the me.

Because we're nothing without obsession with our own self.

Turns out, grief and "loss" is just another way the self verifies its existence.

Turns out, mourning is actually Self-absorbed, Self-ish, and Self-involved.

Not that we're not totally free to sob our little hearts out.

It's just that it's ourselves we cry over.

Not the loved one. They are now, thankfully, fine.

They don't need our tears.

Once this is seen, the tears may stop.

And something may relax.

Something that doesn't hurt, doesn't cry, doesn't mourn.

Something that's not missing out. Something that's not lost.

Because it could be that there is no loss.

When all is complete, and full,

and all filled up,

With love.

"Since before time, I have been free.
Birth and death are only doors through which we pass,
sacred thresholds on our journey.
Birth and death are a game of hide-and-seek.
So laugh with me,
hold my hand,
let us say good-bye,
say good-bye,
to meet again soon.
We meet today.
We will meet again tomorrow.
We will meet at the source every moment.
We meet each other in all forms of life."

~Thich Nhat Hanh

IS THIS IT?

November 22, 2022

"The plain fact is that if you don't have a problem, you create one. If you don't have a problem you don't feel that you are living."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"It just goes to show you, it's always something - if it ain't one thing, it's another. You either got a toenail in your hamburger or toilet paper clinging to your shoe."

~Gilda Radner as Rosanne Rozannadanna

"It will happen to all of us that one day you'll be tapped on the shoulder and told - not just that the party's over - but worse: the party's going on, but you have to leave; and is going on without you. That's the reflection, I think, that most upsets people about their demise."

~Christopher Hitchens

"It's always fear beneath the surface, no matter how it manifests. People don't like to have their version of reality f**ked with. Try it if you still need to get it out of your system, but prepare yourself for unpleasant results."

~Jed McKenna

Here in the US we just finished a holiday where, in between the yams and apple pie, we spend a bit of time being grateful.

Apparently a holiday is needed for this. Because the mind skews towards problems.

So it takes a fair amount of intentional effort- gratitude lists, prayers, affirmations- to focus on what's good for more than half a second.

Today though, let's satisfy the mind for a moment. Let's give attention to what is not right in your life.

Wallow on-purpose in all the troubles, issues, and needs-to-changes. The traumatic past, the scary future, those pesky disliked feelings. The stupid boss or lack of friends or worrisome finances. Not to mention flaws- yours and other people's.

All that wanting but still not getting, yet with absolute certainty that you're needing- money, love, sleep, health, safety.

Enlightenment starts to look pretty dang good right about now, doesn't it?

I mean, equanimity in the face of all those issues and don't-likes? Bliss? Calm at all times?

Yes please.

Although… "at all times" means "always," As in, 100%.

Anything less is unsatisfying. Anything less is inadequate. Anything less is, "More work to do," and, "I'm not there yet."

And of course you're right; if perfect calm is the "I've arrived!" indicator, then you're *not* there and your life *is* something less.

Because as you may have noticed, perfect 100% calm is a tad elusive.

So its lack leaves you with, "There has got to be more than this agitated, aggravating, and sometime miserable daily life."

As in, this can't be it. This better not be it.

The thing is, *Chop wood, carry water* doesn't mean *Live peacefully forever.*

Enlightenment does not mean no pain.

It means living with what is, now, as it is. That includes all the messed up, imperfect, make-it-betters in daily life.

And of course, what else can it be? Consciousness's infinite mix leaves nothing out. Regardless of humans' little preferences.

100% calm is not even slightly interesting to existence.

Though if equanimity at all times has to be your goal, sure, have at it.

Existence includes that too.

The thing is…if you were somehow to successfully get perfect calm at all times, would you be happy at last?

Please.

Boorrring. Predictable. Monotonous.

Turns out even perfect bliss is not good enough. Turns out humans can make, "I have more work to do because this is not enough," out of anything.

Including enlightenment.

Besides, what are you going to do with more peace, anyway? You can't handle the abundant peace you've already got.

I mean, take a moment to notice all the okness, all the good, all the peace and calm that's truly already here in your daily life.

Without discounting or muddying it with what isn't right and what isn't here.

Gravity and air and skin to hold insides in and pets and colors and sounds and language and places to sit. The money and love you do have, the sleep you do get regardless of how much you think you should have, the health you do have whether it's enough for you or not, along with the abundance of calm or neutral feelings.

Well.

It's a lot.

Waaaaay more than the usual problems the mind obsessively keeps its attention on.

Turns out *This is it* includes everything you want.

And it's already here.

Right now.

No effort needed.

Isn't that a perfection worth noticing?

It might even be

Enlightening.

"One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right."

~Alexander Pope

"You wander from room to room hunting for the diamond that is already around your neck."

~Rumi

"Small delights -
a clear winter sunset through the natural iron grillwork of black trees,
a street lamp shining through ice-encased branches,
blue sky glittering,
and sun on ice-crusted snow.
Loveliness, loveliness."

~Sylvia Plath

LIFE'S POINT OR PURPOSE

December 6, 2022

"Unpopular opinion: I don't think your life has to have a purpose, or you a grand ambition; I think it's okay to just wander through life finding interesting things until you die."

~twitter.com/ambernoelle

"We are not created for any grander purpose than the ants that are there or the flies that are hovering around us or the mosquitoes that are sucking our blood."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"This very moment, this very world, this very body is the point. Now. You see? But, if you're seeking something beyond all the time, you never get with it. You're never here."

~Alan Watts

"It's always fear beneath the surface, no matter how it manifests. People don't like to have their version of reality f**ked with. Try it if you still need to get it out of your system, but prepare yourself for unpleasant results."

~Jed McKenna

Lately there's been a fresh wave of clients asking, "What's the point? What's the point of being on earth if I'm not here to contribute?"

For these folks, as for so many others, it's not enough to contentedly live with whatever varied life situations and flaws and preferences show up.

No, life must be earned, deserved. Humans have to be worthy. Humans have to find a way to qualify, by meeting a requirement to have purpose, meaning, a raison d'être.

Humans must boost whatever existence already has going, with some value-add.

Or else.

Or else guilt, shame, depression, worry, and suicidal thoughts.

Never mind that the "contribution" we add is not very well defined. I mean, what would be a worthy-of-life Point?

How can a mere human contribute to existence?

Must we help the poor, or a family member in crisis, or impress the company with illustrious ideas at work, or save the climate, in order to deserve to live?

And exactly how much contributing is required? Must we help all people, or just a few? Must it be 24/7, or are we allowed nights off, weekends off, long breaks? What percentage of our time on earth needs to be purposeful?

We act as if it's a tough taskmaster, this life/consciousness/existence thingy, as it sits around evaluating if we're worthy of waking up in the morning.

When actually, if we're going to believe that the question *What's the point*? makes any sense, we have to believe that existence is inadequate and in need of humans' help. Because clearly it can't provide enough reason for being on its own. Existence needs us to add value in order to make life right.

Making the sticky question, *Well then what's the point?* just an indirect way of saying, "Consciousness/god/Existence/life is not good enough as it is. It needs us to add something, improve, help, and fix something, in order for life to be worthwhile."

Good ol' humans, as full of ourselves as ever.

And yet we can see that this reasoning is faulty. Because no matter how needy we like to think existence may be, somehow it's still the boss.

Supposedly demanding that we have a purpose for living.

Supposedly the boss has tasked us with a job: find the purpose for this particular life and carry it out. Solve all the problems that existence created in the first place.

Making us kind of a slave or handmaiden to it, rather than the other way around.

Do things right and we may be allowed to live.

Not noticing that we are *already* allowed to live.

Y'know, being alive and all.

So it seems the requirement to have a point or purpose is not actually a requirement.

Which makes it just a nasty thought that makes a miserable failure out of a perfectly good life. A perfectly good iteration of consciousness.

And what goes unnoticed is that each of us already contributes a fully unique, one-of-a-kind experience.

Because nothing alive is an exact replica of any other alive thing. There are no living duplicates. Even twins, blades of grass, animals, and microorganisms, have differences and vary one from the next. No two are ever identical.

So here's consciousness experiencing itself through the enormous variety of these infinitely immersive, multi-sensory lives.

Each one bringing its own fascinating experience.

No need to add "value" to that. The value is already in the unique experience we each bring.

Because every one of us is the only one- *the only one*- who can offer to consciousness this particular, never-will-be-repeated, version of life.

Which means that just being alive *IS* the contribution.

Just being alive is the point.

Just being alive is the purpose.

It's not possible for anyone to not contribute.

Sure, thought may insist we lack purpose, but that doesn't mean we aren't living our purpose already anyway.

And doing it spectacularly well.

The point is clear.

We are alive. We breathe. We walk and talk and like and dislike and want and cry and laugh.

We are experience, experiencing.

And that, as it is,

is the whole perfect, already-here, point.

Which makes insisting on additional contribution or purpose

Kind of pointless.

"Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies?"

~Alan Watts

"Living is life's only purpose."

~Nisargadatta

"The Rose is without an explanation; She blooms, because She blooms."

~Angelus Silesius

OVERWHELM

December 13, 2022

Overwhelm:

1) bury or drown beneath a huge mass.

syn: swamp, engulf, bury, deluge

2) defeat completely

syn: vanquish, overpower, overcome, overthrow, suppress, crush

It's that time of year again. That most wonderful time of Get Things Done, via overbooked calendars and extra-long to-do lists.

There's lots to do and a holiday deadline to do it all by.

Oh hey there, Overwhelm, come on in. Bring your friend-thoughts, "Too much! Can't handle! Can't do it all!" Also a big howdy to your companions panic, anxiety, self-disgust, and action-paralysis too.

Plan, clean, cook, bake, buy, wrap. Arrange travel, parties, family dinners, and obligatory socializing.

And be joyous about all of it, dammit.

Yes, it's over the top with whelm.

A word that means the exact same thing as overwhelm.

Because at this fine time of the year, why not use two words to say what one word can, making that one word longer and extra-intense for no reason other than to increase drama.

Much like our To-do List.

So call it overwhelm, as in engulf, drown, overrun, overcome, crush.

And then pretend there's a legit danger that we can indeed literally be crushed by words, petty tasks, and hope-to-do-'ems.

The self, vanquished. Overcome. Undone.

By chores.

Oh noooooooooo.

Fragile little thing, eh?

I mean, you'd think that all those years spent propping up the image as we like it, building that self-thingy up, doing our best to believe that it's us, would cushion and protect us.

But instead there's frantic panic about the sense of self disappearing under the weight of The List. All that carefully cultivated self-control, the well-planned management of the future, just... disintegrating.

Oh.

The bad feeling starts to make sense.

So for a bit of relief, let's notice first that overwhelm is just a feeling and a small handful of thoughts. Both of which we're experts at experiencing.

Nothing we can't handle there.

And then shockingly, we might also notice that nothing on The List actually needs to be done. At all.

Yes we think we want to, yes we think we *have* to.

But in actuality, none of it is necessary.

You know how we can know this? Because year after year, The List doesn't get completed, there are always lots of things still left to do, and yet life goes on just fine.

So now, right about here, thought may trot out the notion of consequences and a painful future.

"The holidays won't be joyous."

Fine. Is overwhelm joyous? Surely nothing makes your family happier than seeing you drown in petty to-dos.

Or- "The kids will be sad and hate me, there won't be any food, it will be a terrible holiday. This is not how it's supposed to be."

Like humans know how things are supposed to be. Sure, reality proves us wrong over and over, but never mind.

And let's not forget what it means, about us, as a person, if we don't do all the important things on The List.

"No presents means I'm a bad parent. No parties means I'm unlovable. No family dinner means I'm weird, damaged, alone."

As if the self- who we are- is defined by whether we go to a party or get the kids a toy.

That's a whole lot of self-identity going on there, under the supposed guise of overwhelm.

So is your friendly Mind-Tickler saying don't do anything at holiday time?

Nah, lots of things get done regardless. I mean, try not doing them. The body gets up off the couch for some things anyway.

So maybe it's possible to play with holding The List lightly.

Noticing what we really want to happen vs. what would be nice but not worth the cost of panic.

It could turn out that we and our families have more fun and are happier when we are not stressed to the max.

We might chance doing less. Even only to find out if the self does indeed vanish or if it carries on, regardless of what gets done.

Because who knows? A vanished self might turn out to bring its own gifts-

gifts that might not be wrapped, or on The List at all-

maybe even a joy,

which could turn out to be

overwhelming.

CONSCIOUSNESS RISING?

January 10, 2023

"If you understand, things are just as they are.
If you do not understand, things are just as they are."

~Zen proverb

"Once you see the way it is, you won't really wish to change it. It's just the horrible beauty of suffering."

~Ram Dass

So there I was a few days ago,shamelessly eavesdropping on someone else's conversation.

And there they were, earnestly expounding about how the world's consciousness is moving to a higher plane of love, peace, and all things living in harmony. This person believes the planet is getting to a state of higher awareness, beyond self-interest and craving.

Whoo hooo! We're on the way! Transcending the ego state coming up any minute now. No more killing, no more cruelty, no more unfairness or suffering, poverty or pain.

Although…. we've heard this before, haven't we? At least for many many decades.

Unsurprisingly, your friendly Mind Tickler has a few questions.

Because how does this work, exactly?

First, where's the evidence that this miraculous journey to peace and love is now happening? Has this person not seen any news, like, ever?

And then… "Higher consciousness" - higher than what? What makes it go higher? What has prevented it from doing that so far; what's it waiting for? And what happens to the lower consciousness that's left behind? What's transcending and where does it go?

This version of consciousness seems to be entirely a human thing- other creatures need not apply.

I guess animal instincts are too lowly for higher consciousness. Luckily they just live moment to moment and don't much care about transcending anyway.

Though we might wonder why we care about it.

Because if evolved consciousness is human only, then it's just one out of many liked experiences that could possibly be had. Just a state, one of many possibilities, one of the options.

Not something grand. Not something permanent.

And certainly not the all-encompassing consciousness which includes everything.

Since it's just for humans.

It makes sense we find transcendence appealing though. i mean, we don't like the lowly animal-like true nature of *our own* either, where we have all kinds of desires we can't control and which we believe are wrong. Here we are, getting hungry for dinner and sex and companionship and fun. Here we are, getting angry and hurtful and fighting and following those desires just like every other creature we think is less evolved than we are.

Naturally we'd rather dream that there must be a way to be less war-like, less needy, more advanced. We'd rather imagine there's a way to not want so much, think so much, feel so much.

Never mind that this goal-state has been achieved by no human, ever.

Not one single person has completely gotten beyond self interest to find only love and peace.

Not one.

Yet we insist it is not only possible but on the way and coming soon.

More importantly, what goes unnoticed is that *if* there *is* a doorway to transcending the everyday at all, mostly it has been opened-

not through love, peace, bliss, or gratitude-

But through intense suffering. And through pain.

Which is something well known to mystics, American Indians, shamans, and religious zealots. All of whom found various ways to experience a more heightened awareness through pain.

As in, they hurt themselves on purpose, in order to experience the feeling of transcendence.

And perhaps some lovely readers have discovered that suffering such as depression, hitting rock bottom, or living a dark night of the soul has enabled the phoenix to rise too.

Here's everyone trying to attain personal higher consciousness through calming approaches like meditation and inquiry,

When for so many, it's suffering- suffering they try so hard to eliminate- which actually might succeed in opening that door.

If it can be opened at all.

Now of course I'm not saying go on out and try to hurt.

It's just that the constant attempt to eliminate pain might not be all it's cracked up to be.

Suffering is just as worthy an experience as happiness and spacious awareness,

and it may come with its own charms and blessings.

Besides, consciousness is not some personal ladder-climbing achievement for an individual *Me,* anyway.

Rather, the individual is part of and included in consciousness.

So that any person's "heightened awareness" is just one more thing consciousness gets to experience.

Within consciousness.

Making *higher awareness* no better, no more special, no more evolved, and not even higher, than no awareness at all.

Loving, spacious, peaceful, calm. Contracted, crying, miserable and ego-bound…

Same.

Consciousness eliminates none of it.

Awareness needs nothing from us.

We're already doing this life thing perfectly.

Whether we like it or not.

Making the ideas of *higher consciousness* and *transcendence*

very odd concepts indeed.

SYNCHRONICITY

January 17, 2023

I look up from typing and notice the clock says 11:11.

It's a sign! From the universe.

Yes I looked at the same clock half an hour ago when it said 10:41, and yes it hit 11:11 twelve hours ago too, and even twice yesterday.

But I didn't look up then, so those weren't signs of synchronicity.

It was only a sign once I saw it.

And then, a livestream went and actually repeated two of the exact same words I had just said.

Whoo hoo! Energy is in vibrational alignment. With me!

Something grand is communicating with me specifically, using my personal clock and phone to do it.

What's the message being communicated?

Well, OK I don't know, but it must be important. After all- *The Universe* sent it.

Maybe it means this is going to be a good year and I"ll be ok. Or maybe it's a sign this is the right relationship, the right job, the right decision. Or that I'm on the right wavelength.

Never mind the 3 billion other people out there, who may not be so blessed as to catch the clock at just the right time.

But sheesh, so secretive! Bothering to send a message and then not bothering to make the message clear. Making the effort to show the clock at 11:11 only to be unclear about why it gives a damn at all about me, my year, my relationship, my clock or the number 11.

It's a little weird, this Universe.

Still it can't be denied that coincidences are happening, right? Alignments, synchronicities, commonalities- definitely real, definitely happening. Certain dots are definitely connected.

Even if they're part of a zillion random other dots, which all have to be ignored in order to make meaning out of only some of them.

So what exactly is lining these things up to match? What entity, what power, is interested in sending obscure hints of who-knows-what? And why does it bother, what's in it for it, what's the benefit, what's achieved?

More importantly, why is this one minute on the clock a message for me, but not for my friend who didn't look up just then, or for my client who lives where it's not 11:11 right now but rather 5:11?

Well, I mean hey, I *am* pretty special.

From this central point of view, where miscellaneous things appear to line up in connection to *me,*

this particular self can be seen as vitally important.

Since there can be no doubt, when synchronicity is noticed, that I am the one the stars and energy send messages to and vibrate for.

So if I can catch the clock more often, or pick out a few more corresponding words on the radio, then I'll matter, and control the universe in a small way, or at least work in cahoots with it.

As opposed to the unromantic possibility that humans simply seek for patterns, and insist on creating order out of randomness, and are calmed by repetition, and make meaning where there isn't any.

In order to reassure ourselves of our separate existence and special self importance.

Because for synchronicity to be a valid concept, there has to be an individual that receives messages. An individual who is separate and distinct from the message sender.

Objects must be separate from each other in order to synchronize or align or communicate.

Otherwise there's nothing/ no one to send messages to. In which case, the universe is just sending messages to itself.

No need to do that.

Besides, if all dots are the same connected thing, then there are no dots at all.

Like drops of water in the ocean, they're all the same stuff, with no beginning and no end. And no "each other."

As all the same drop, there's nothing to synchronize.

Which, OK yes, does mess up my importance as a person.

But I can't find where I end and the universe begins.

Luckily I can't get more important than being everything, including all drops and dots.

Leaving me incomprehensibly bigger than any dreams of synchronicity and vibrational alignment and coincidence.

And that unimportance, that nonexistence as an individual,

is such a relief

and so much more satisfying

than any words or any number

will ever pretend to be.

UNDERSTANDING SELF

January 31, 2023

"Understanding is the booby prize."

~Fritz Perls

"I want to understand this river but all I have is a bucket."

~Michael Markham

There is no self. There is only self. We are awareness. We are objects within awareness. We are appearances in awareness. I am that. I am nothing. I am everything. I am conscious. I am consciousness. I'm in relationship with consciousness.

And of course my personal favorite: I'm aware of awareness.

Sure, let's make the thing that is aware of the thing be aware of being aware of the thing.

Got it? Yay!

This is what happens when we turn to the mind- whatever that is- to figure things out.

Because even when we have absolute certainty that we know the answers and get it… have we got the answers? Do we get it?

After all, thought depends on itself to see itself. It depends on itself to understand itself.

Making for a very biased and selective "understanding."

Comprehension is always limited by the capabilities of the thing doing the comprehending.

And in this regard, that thing is not big enough for the job.

This is a key flaw in all those inquiries, enlightenment methods, attempts to "see beyond" the self, and self improvements.

I mean, we also don't know what the self is, let alone how to improve or enlighten it.

It's just not possible to know what's bigger than ourselves.

So any claims of understanding are self-serving.

In every sense of that very apt expression.

And no matter how much we may insist when we think we know something... we're being played the fool by thought.

Because the mind only pretends to understand. While actually not the least bit interested in understanding.

I mean, what would happen if thinking was able to truly see how nothing, insignificant, limited and unimportant, it really is?

Yeah, no way thought's going to be good with that.

So the only reasonable state is ever, "I don't know."

Because honey, we don't.

No matter how articulately anyone expounds their point of view, it remains an opinion.

So all the blah blah about consciousness and awareness and self and "I am"?

Masturbatory nonsense. Just mind playing with itself.

And yes it may be comforting to think we understand consciousness. But really we're never truly going to be able to do anything but guess.

Even though mind loudly insists it knows something.

Nothing wrong with any of this, of course.

It's fine to play with our selves. Nothing wrong with a little self manipulation.

It's just that we'll wait forever for that happy ending.

Silly, unsatisfied little things.

Aren't we adorable?

LOVE

February 7, 2023

"What is this love that we love so much? The love of one ego for another? Of one false self for another? My avatar loves your avatar? My lie loves your lie? Is it a person we love or love itself?"

~Jed McKenna

"If you say that you love your husband, what does that have to do with him? You're just telling him who you are."

~Byron Katie

Valentine's day is coming, so let's talk about love.

Recently I brought home two adult cats. One was very cuddly right away, immediately followed me around, purred when I pet him, and slept next to me while I worked. The other was more skittish and kept to herself unless playing with her brother. Her love has still to be won; I have to work for and earn it.

So to be clear, one cat is already very loving and already all about me. The other is taking some work to make her all about me.

OK, are we detecting a common denominator in there?

Meanwhile, when it comes to love in our human lives, what is it and why do we want it so much? And why do we connect more to some than others?

The answer probably isn't in how wonderful the other person is.

I mean, even Hitler had a girlfriend.

So maybe reviewing some very typical thoughts humans have about loving others can help us figure this out. See if you recognize any:

"Is that other person thinking about me? (Hey that makes two of us thinking about me- we're so compatible!)

Do they like me? Are they nice to me? Are they interested in my looks, my job, my lifestyle? Do they think I'm funny, smart, cute, sexy? Do they have the same ideas and likes that I have, do they agree with me about important things? Do they appreciate my help, my considerateness, my skills and ability to solve problems? Can I be myself around them?"

Hmmm. Not one of those thoughts is about someone else.

Each one is about the Me.

Could it be we love our spouse, our kids, our pets, because they love us?

Could it be we love Love because it proves something about us, means something about us, pays attention to us?

What we call "love" is starting to look like Me creation, masquerading as love.

Maybe that's why it feels so good.

And maybe that's why the appeal of someone else seeing us in a way we like, paying attention to us, and thinking we're lovable, is so very strong.

Because if someone else thinks we're great, doesn't that mean we are great?

Although then we might also begin to notice that when we think others love us, that's just us, thinking.

And when we think about how others see us, that's also just us, creating our own liked story and attributing those thoughts to others.

And when we see these loved ones, and touch them, and hear them, those are experiences dependent on us, experienced by us.

The thoughts, the touch, the sights, the feelings- all of that- is nothing without the Me.

In which case, where's the so-called other person whom we love?

Yoooo hooooooo.

Ugh. No thanks. Much more fun to think we're seen and cared-for and esteemed by a clear and distinctly not-me someone else.

It seems our literal existence as an individual depends on the kind of idealized image-making we call Love.

Oh well, hey, at least then we're a loved individual.

At least then we're *something*.

As opposed to nothing.

Or as opposed to all-encompassing everything.

Darn it. So much for nice stories of The One and forever and Twin Flames and Soul Mates.

Because it turns out it's just us here.

Just us, pretending we're a separate thing, which is involved with and loving other separate things.

Just us, Being everything.

That's the game here.

Isn't it fun?

We do love it.

After all, what else can everything do but love itself?

And who is there who doesn't love that?.

WHEN THE SELF IS SEEN WRONG

February 21, 2023

"In most of our human relationships, we spend much of our time reassuring each other that our costumes of identity are on straight."

~Ram Dass

"And what is our personality? Our personality is what we call our 'image'. Our image of ourselves. And also our thought about ourselves, our idea of ourselves. This is the person. In other words what people meet and understand, and what I understand as Alan Watts, is a big act, which is not really me."

~Alan Watts

"We are nothing but images of images. Reality, including ourselves, is nothing but a thin and fragile veil, beyond which ... there is nothing."

~Carlo Rovelli

Recently some family members sweetly informed me that they think my life choices –not having children, living alone, not throwing dinner parties- indicate that something is very wrong with me.

Apparently my loved ones see me as socially damaged, afraid, isolated, and of course, plain ol' weird.

Whaattt? They don't see me as independent, free thinking, comfortable in my own skin? They see me differently than I like? This is an outrage!

I mean, if you're going to bother thinking about me, get it right will ya?

Let's face it, we all have a way we want to be seen- smart, caring, spiritually evolved, attractive, good.

We have a lifetime of carefully-honed presentation and story-building, as we try to "come across" to others in those ways.

As in, we try to make others think right ideas about us.

Never mind that we also have personality quirks and odd little habits which don't fit those right ideas. There's the drawers and closets hiding chaos, the quick temper, the desire to be admired and better than others. There's all those compulsions, addictions, irritations and preferences.

Yeah we do our best to hide those.

Let's hide the social anxiety or suicidal thoughts or the indignation when someone calls us stupid or lazy or loser. Let's hide that we haven't had sex in years, that our skivvies have skid marks, that taxes are 5 years overdue, that we cower rather than confront, that we binge at night after eating very little in front of friends.

The self has secrets.

Because it must control the presentation. Because it must be defined somehow.

Otherwise the self is nothing. Otherwise we might realize that what we call "Me" doesn't exist.

Yes we know this. That's why it feels so necessary to hide so carefully, and to put our best foot forward, and to avoid situations where we can't do

either.

Ok well, that's a big secret right there.

Unfortunately, periodically someone doesn't buy what we're selling. Periodically, despite all of our careful branding, someone sees us "incorrectly".

Then the fact that the sham, the illusion, the façade might be exposed suddenly becomes a possibility.

It is never a happy moment when that happens.

That's when we freak out with shame, fury, hurt, anguish. That's when we obsessively replay conversations in our heads, argue with no one in the shower, rehearse what to say next time.

We'll set them right, dammit.

Meanwhile really nothing has happened. Someone had a view of us which is not the view we wanted them to have.

Other than that, nothing.

And yet still it feels so important that people "get" us and see us right.

The sense of who we are rides on pretending images and identity are an actual person. The sense of who we are rides on flimsy things like others' opinions about us.

Otherwise there's nothing to hold onto.

Ok fine, what do we do with this?

Well, when we're upset in troubling situations, simply understanding that the pain comes from being identified in a way that clashes with the preferred view of ourself, can ease that upset a little.

We might think specifically about how we'd like those people to see us. In this situation I want them to see me as normal, reasonable, right, lovable, successful, kind. Or whatever.

And then we might consider how those people actually do see us (as far as we know).

And notice they don't match.

That mismatch is the source of the fury, hurt, and shame.

That clash between the life-long image, up against the threat of exposure of its lie- that's what makes us feel bad.

Because to the hologram, of course it feels dangerous that the plug might be pulled.

Is this avoidable? Nope. Not even Ramana escaped the pain of being seen "wrong."

The sense of self is built into every cell, every feeling, every thought. Maintenance of that illusion is a 24/7 requirement.

That's the game here. There's no getting around it.

Luckily there can be a little peace, a little kindness, in that accepting that unavoidability.

There can be calm in seeing that we're doing our best as a wispy image.

Sometimes we succeed in fooling ourselves and others that we're more than that.

Sometimes we don't.

When we don't pull it off, it can be upsetting.

Even so, no view or opinion is a person.

No image or identity or story is a self.

Which leaves flimsy holograms with a whole bunch of nothing.

And also the relief of a whole bunch of

So what.

NO THINKING!

March 7, 2023

"He was trying to think about what the world would be like without having thoughts about it."

~Michael Markham

"Is not thinking itself a notion in the mind?"

~Nisargadatta

Oh looky here, another lengthy social media discussion about thoughts.

As in, something needs to be done about them. As in, what can be done about them.

Every good spiritual seeker knows that thoughts are bad, n'kay?

We're at war with thinking. Apparently it's a powerful enemy we mustn't allow to live.

Apparently it's not enough that humans try to control absolutely everything in these lives- love, safety, health, feelings, money, time, productivity, desires, future.

No, we shall master thought too- ours and other people's. (We don't want others thinking the wrong thoughts about us, do we?)

Thinking does not get a pass.

Thought-management is required for enlightened self-less clear transcendence.

So ideally, the goal is to stop rumination completely. Eradication is highly preferred. Find a way to shut those babies down into complete mental silence.

Although try attaining realization, understanding, or "getting it," without thinking.

In fact, try living in any way without thoughts. Try raising kids, working, planning dinner, or listening to some teacher on you-tube, without thoughts.

We can't have one without all of it.

Ok fine, then stretch thoughts out so that there's lots more calm zoned-out empty space in-between thoughts.

Or, if that can't be done either, then for goodness' sake at least find ways to not believe them. And reroute thoughts so they go somewhere more to our liking.

Ok, let's take a moment and rethink this.

Because guess who it's up to, to make all that happen?

That would be us.

It's us who must wrestle thinking into line, whether through meditation or inquiry or psychedelics.

It's us who must control something that has been around for millennia, minding its own business, trying to force it to take us where we want to go, rather than where it wants.

Yep, it's all-powerful humans who will surely harness and put a leash on that.

Hmmm. Perhaps right about here, it's worth noticing what wants thought gone in the first place.

Because that would be... thought. What says thought is a problem? Thought.

Thought says, “I’m a very bad thing, I stand between you and contentment, so I need to make my very own self vanish forever.”

It wants to be rid of itself? Um, OK.

And the thing is, what for? Just so that we can score some blissful feeling we happen to like?

Maybe all we need is just different thoughts. Nicer thoughts. More positive thoughts. Fewer of them. Thoughts that take us where we want to go.

‘Course, we are not in charge of any of that.

Not to mention that consciousness has no problem with any of this. After all, human thinking is It too.

That means it doesn’t matter if thoughts exist, if they’re something or nothing, if they say things we like or don’t, if they bring a feeling we like or don’t.

So maybe we can leave the management of thinking to whatever owns it, and let go of that misguided battle.

Maybe instead of trying to turn What Is into our limited version of “better” by willful control,

Maybe instead of adding extra thoughts about managing thinking to the pile of thoughts we are supposedly trying to reduce,

we can just make peace with it, as it is.

Because fighting for control of something much much bigger than we'll ever be, seems an odd way to seek peace, bliss, or enlightenment.

Whereas watching thinking come, watching it be liked or disliked, watching it float off and be replaced by the next, is easier. More inclusive. Less at-fault. Calmer. More peaceful.

And that just might turn out to be a whole lot closer to

what we wanted to get

by controlling thoughts

to begin with.

"You can't empty your mind of thoughts. You might as well try to empty the ocean of its water. But ...why would you even want to empty your mind, unless you're at war with reality?"

~Byron Katie

"A common misconception is
The belief that thinking is
The creation of thought.
Rather, it is
The reception of thought from
A source which has no name and
From a place that cannot be found.
Since one can't decide to think
Nor can one decide
Thoughts' contents,
Why does one
Claim their ownership?
Is every sound wu'hsin's because
He can hear them?"

~Wu Hsin

NOT THE BODY

March 14, 2023

"You are not the body.
You were not the body.
You will not remain the body."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in."

~Mario Puzo, The Godfather

So maybe you *get it* for a while.

Maybe you have a few blissed-out hours or days or weeks, see that you don't exist, experience that there is no self, become clear about the unreality of reality.

You may get a whiff or a lengthy immersion. You are all shiny with realization.

For however long, it's quite clear that you are not the body.

And then… what's this?

Depression, fear, panic, what's-the point, no motivation, why get out of bed, it's all nothing anyway.

An inexorable slide into… feelings.

Bad feelings, hard feelings, intense feelings. Dark night of the soul feelings. Life-crushing terrified feelings.

Quickly, Not-the-body disappears, replaced by All-about-the-body.

Because the feeling is too intense to be ignored. It's awful, so there's really no choice.

So naturally you pay lots attention to it- describing, figuring out its meaning, analyzing, theorizing, connecting dots.

Ignoring is not even considered, what with everyone and everything telling you to feel, and sit with, and be with, and embody.

Which is ironic, since in the Got it! moments, you'd just experienced the exact opposite of embodiment.

And now here you are, sitting with those nasty feelings in the not-so-secret hope of tricking them into going away forever. (Shhh, don't say that part out loud.)

Meanwhile, notice the timing of this terrible darkness.

It shows up just as you see that you're not what you thought.

Just as it's seen that the body is irrelevant to what you are, focus pulls you right back to that body.

Right back to the feels-terrible self.

While it tries to figure out why it can't hold onto enlightenment.

Something is crying and curled up in a non-moving ball and pouting very hard about not being the star of the show anymore.

Aa attention routes back to wondering what's wrong with that self, and thinking death would be better.

Which is kind of funny, actually. I mean, here's thought saying you would be better off dead than be an illusion.

As in, death is ok, but not-existing isn't.

Alrighty then.

Meanwhile, you're hoping to get back to that enlightened state. But a no-body experience can't happen when you're all about the body and its feelings.

The body is required equipment to maintain, not dissipate, the sense of self.

Focus on how body feels keeps one from noticing self's lack of reality.

Feelings are the go-to resort of a mind threatened by its own nothingness.

Fine. Can you do anything about this?

Perhaps not.

Other than to notice what's left if you're not The One Inside the Body who is forced to feel terrible things.

Notice what's left if, rather than being you, the one feeling,

and you, the one located in and affiliated with that body,

you're literally feeling itself, instead.

Transitory, changing, uncentered, impermanent.

Unlocated.

Without body to house it, the sense of self has no place to land.

Without body to house it, there's no one to feel, and no one to place inside it.

Leaving no self-reference hiding inside feelings, whether liked or disliked.

Leaving focus on Being

rather than feeling.

And no one to have a preference

either way.

"You can't empty your mind of thoughts. You might as well try to empty the ocean of its water. But ...why would you even want to empty your mind, unless you're at war with reality?"

~Byron Katie

"A common misconception is
The belief that thinking is
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From a place that cannot be found.
Since one can't decide to think
Nor can one decide
Thoughts' contents,
Why does one
Claim their ownership?
Is every sound wu'hsin's because
He can hear them?"

~Wu Hsin

THE ADDICTED SELF

March 21, 2023

"Addiction is when you can't get enough of what you don't want."

~Deepak Chopra

Food, alcohol, phone, cigarettes, porn, sex, shopping, gambling, social media, games. Chips bread coffee soda beer pot Taco Bell and Mickey D.

Can't resist, do it even though you wish you wouldn't.

You're addicted.

No one is exempt. Everyone has at least one, usually more than one, addiction.

Everyone wants to feel good and has multiple ways of getting that feeling.

Everyone thinks about their favorite addictions in the same way, too- calling them treats, calling them pleasure, calling them numbing feelings, calling them distraction.

And goodness knows there are plenty of theories and methods out there for dealing with addiction. Pause before indulging, or examine past trauma, or sit with the urge or the uncomfortable feelings until the desire passes.

Except the desire doesn't pass. It just waits, haranguing you, until you give in. So you will give in. You're compelled to give in.

No one seems to notice what's actually being craved.

It’s obviously not the cigarette or wine or entire bag of cookies. Pay any attention to the actual present-moment experience for half a minute, and it becomes clear that that experience is basically pretty gross and unfulfilling and sometimes even scary.

But no problem, because you’re not paying attention, other than maybe the first minute or two. You're not tasting that entire bag of chips you’re eating while watching TV. You’re looking at your phone while smoking. Right in the middle of this round of sex, you’re thinking about when you can go at it again.

Craving entices you to do the activity, and then, having succeeded at getting you to indulge, attention moves on.

All that was wanted by the craving was to get you to do it.

And then you give in, and do it, and then thought quickly switches from, Do it Do it Do it, too,What have you done?! You shouldn’t have done that.

So really if you think about it, it's kind of odd to characterize addictive activities as being “nice to you.”

It's kind of odd to call it a break, a comfort, a treat. It's kind of odd to say things like, “I deserve this.”

As in, I’ve had a great day so I deserve a reward. Or, I’ve a bad day so I deserve something “nice” as compensation.

So what exactly is it is you deserve? This hangover, this lost money, this self-hatred, this dirty feeling, this lack of sleep?

That’s a funny kind of treat.

That sounds more like you deserve punishment, not reward.

Since once the compulsion is given into, it promptly turns into a mental and emotional whipping.

Could it be it's not the pleasure at all, but actually the whipping after, that is the true goal of addictive craving? Not the cigarette itself, but the self-hate and punishment after?

I mean, the pleasure is barely there, and barely noticed. The craving just gets you to the punishment.

And what might you deserve punishment for?

Well, there's always the standard go-tos such as not good enough, not kind enough, not a good person, not social enough, not achieving enough, not enlightened enough. There's always getting angry, being afraid, being alone, failing, procrastinating.

The list of your imperfections and needs-improvements goes on and on.

Just like addiction does.

And it starts to become clear, if you were able to stop characterizing compulsion as a reward for a moment, that through that punishment, addictive behavior serves as a weight to the sense of self. Grounding, anchoring, holding it down. Making the sense of being a person feel more solid. Preventing it from getting too light, too airy, too feeling good.

Addiction is an anvil for the sense of self.

Keeping attention on problem and wrongness and lack of control and wishing for something else, can cause a person to miss that you might not be what you thought, at all.

Perhaps it's not coincidence that so many so-called enlightened people experienced the same addictions you do. Alan Watts, Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, Mooji. All those sex scandals, all that smoking, all that craving for love and adoration.

I mean, if you've ever seen pictures, it's clear that even the Buddha ate too much.

Perhaps there's some comfort in seeing that the addictive cycle is not unique to you.

It's a very predictable pattern. It's scripted.

Do it. You shouldn't have. What's wrong with you. Stop that next time.

Over and over.

So if this interests you at all, for a while, you might take a break from trying to quit. Leave it alone, and instead simply begin to notice whether the net result is an actual treat, or an actual punishment.

For now, simply noticing the true goal.

Noticing the lack of reward. Noticing the punishment.

Seeing what it is you're really after.

And then seeing if that addiction-

that phone or pot or horse race-

has the ability to ever

give that to you.

GETTING RID OF EGO

March 28, 2023

"We are quick to denounce ego as untrue, but this marvelous palace would just be an empty box without it. Ego is the magic that brings the dreamstate to life."

~Jed McKenna

Hey everybody, time to get rid of ego!

Time to finally reach that desirable egoless state you've all heard so much about, and make sure you stay there permanently.

Only then will you have arrived. Only then will you be able to have a good, right life. Only then will you be done with seeking, improving, enlightening, journeying.

Until then there's more work to do.

So in ever-helpful Mind-Tickler fashion, here's a little pop quiz to monitor your progress along the path.

1- What is it that wants to get rid of ego?

2- What says doing so is a worthwhile goal? What says it's even a possible goal?

3- What makes ego go away?

4- Where does it go to, once kicked out?

5- What remains behind after ego is gone?

6- What knows it’s gone?

7- If, heaven forbid, ego comes back, what knows that? How does it know that?

So there you go, my friends.

A few little questions to help clear things up.

You're welcome.

Today’s talk has been brought to you by...

well,

definitely not ego.

MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY

April 4, 2023

L. dreams about being in a house on the ocean, waves crashing into windows. Upstairs water begins to collect around the bed where her boyfriend is cheating on her. When she wakes, she glares in fury and accusation at said boyfriend, who is lying with her in bed reading his kindle.

S. is a musician with a concert coming up. She worries for weeks that she'll make mistakes, critics will hate her, her career down the tubes. During the concert she loses track of the music for 15 seconds, and improvises her own notes into the middle of Beethoven's. Afterwards, the applause is deafening, her performance called stunning. It's everything she could hope for, fears quieted, for now.

R. dreams of failing tests, standing without pants at work, teeth falling out. He wakes, panicked. Each day it takes

hours to shake the feeling that something terrible has happened.

P. is concerned about his failing business. The bills keep coming. He sees the employees laid off, his kids' sadness, the foreclosure, the shopping cart, the bridge he'll have to sleep under. These same fears have been happening for years.

Nightime: our brain makes up stories and then gets scared, sad or angry about them.

Daytime: our brain makes up stories and then gets scared, sad or angry about them.

While we're asleep, we don't question the reality of the dream. Out cold, we totally buy into it. In dreams there is indeed a house, an ocean, a cheating boyfriend. It feels real until we open our eyes.

And sometimes long after.

The night dream creates its own world. It wanders unburdened by appropriateness into wackadoo fantasy. Odd things happen. Objects morph, subjects change, with no continuity. Emotions accompany it all.

When we're awake, we don't question the reality of the dream either. We totally buy into that too. There is indeed a house, an ocean, a cheating boyfriend.

The day dream also creates its own world. Situations we like or don't like appear very real. Odd predictions of things that never happen. Emotions accompany it all.

Same.

And yet somehow when our eyes open, we call this "reality."

Not noticing that daytime events almost never occur the way we anticipate, or that memories and interpretations of the so-called past are almost always inaccurate (don't take my word for this- there are zillions of studies proving it.)

Not noticing that whatever health or money or love situations appear to happen, we are still literally ok.

Even if we're on the street, or seemingly alone, or dying, or wanting to die.

Seems we'd much rather pretend these movie scenes are real, and panic, yearn, wish, for years.

Now if, reading this, the mind is indignant at the possibility that all those teachers could be right- (**see below for a taste)

that the waking world is not real and instead is a dream-

Then it should have no trouble finding the dividing line between asleep and awake. Where does it flip from one to the other? Does the end of the night dream live in the eyelids, in the position of a body?

Could it be the only difference is the thought, “I am awake now, and this now is real?”

Meanwhile, either way, awake or asleep, eyes open or closed, the dream focuses on Me.

The self.

The hero, centerpiece, protagonist and focal point of every story.

It revolves around us.

Making us seem like we matter, we’re important, we’re necessary.

Our self is required.

Ok fine, so what? What happens when this is seen?

Well, some folks call that “enlightenment.”

But whether that’s so or not, maybe the day dream can just become more fun.

As we float

In a dream boat

Merrily merrily.

Merrily merrily.

Because life

is but…

"A wise man, recognizing that the world is but an illusion, does not act as if it is real, so he escapes the suffering."

~Buddha

"The world, indeed, is like a dream and the treasures of the world are an alluring mirage!"

~Buddha

"We are like the spider. We weave our life and then move along in it. We are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives in the dream. This is true for the entire universe."

~The Upanishads

"That world that appears to you in your dreams at night is just as unreal as the world that appears to you when you are awake. There is no difference whatsoever."

~Jac O'Keeffe

"This place is a dream.
Only a sleeper considers it real.
Then death comes like dawn,
and you wake up laughing
at what you thought was your grief"

~Rumi

"Your world is a dream. You're living in an illusion."

~Adyashanti

"All that apparently manifests is a hypnotic dream."

~Tony Parsons

THE BEST YOU

April 11, 2023

"The human mind is not a debating hall, but a picture gallery."

~Douglas Harding

"Can you imagine a planet where people see images, pictures in their head, and believe they're real? That's CRAZY."

~Byron Katie

Think of "the best you."

Y'know, the social one who comfortably says the right things, the successful one who gets lots done, the creative who produces great stuff, the talented winner of the sport.

The self you want to be. Confidant, unselfish, knowledgeable, articulate, loving. Or whatever.

The ideal self.

See it?

Can you notice that in the mind's eye, there are images of that best you?

Whenever thinking about who or how you want to be in any situation, those images show up to light the way.

Kind of like an internal pep rally: *Be this! You can do it! Yaaaay team!*

When you're evaluating if you're a good person, or if you're lovable, or if you did well, those images are the standard by which you judge yourself.

Yep, that's what you're measuring yourself against- mental pictures.

And not just any mental pictures. Idealized mental pictures, of fictional you-perfection.

Pie-in-the-sky portraits of a person.

Who doesn't exist.

Because let's face it, that person is not you.

That's why you're trying so hard, wishing so much, to become that.

So there you are in the middle of every situation, watching and comparing to those very fast, auto-pilot idealized images.

And the constant determination of "Am I doing well?" is based on how closely your behavior and feelings match that exemplary image of supposed-you.

Come close to matching the pictures, and you feel pretty darn good.

Doesn't seem quite fair though, does it, for the standard of measurement of your value as a person to be riding completely on mentally conceived pixels of perfection.

Because, I mean, *idealized*.

As in, *ideal*.

And now think of you as you "really are." People annoy you, not near enough gets done, you're not enlightened, you're bad unlovable inadequate wrong lacking.

Do you notice these are images too?

Images of the opposite of perfection- aka not-ideal, screw-up, you. Clenching in the tennis match, ruining the painting or song, blurting out the wrong thing, snapping at the kids.

Idealized bad, rather than idealized good.

That's what most folks mean by, "the real me."

Mental pictures that come with a bad feeling.

Luckily the good news is that neither image- not the good or the bad, the feeling or the no-feeling portrayal- is you.

Because *no image is a person*.

Yet this is what "liking yourself" comes down to: how closely the portrait of not-enough-you matches the portrait of ideal-perfect-you in any situation.

Comparing one mental depiction to another. *Coming close* feels good. *Nowhere near* feels terrible.

Fine. Why does this matter?

Well of course it doesn't. It can be informative though.

Because a hefty percentage of everyone's suffering- depression, anxiety, and "failure"- is simply this unnoticed comparison

of one idealized image to another idealized image.

One mirage compared to another.

Calling those unnoticed, stylized, mental depictions- "Me."

The delusion that any picture is “Me” makes for a bunch of unhappy, feeling-inadequate, humans.

Yeah humans aren’t nuts at all.

To be clear though, it’s not like there’s an alternative. This mega-fast comparing cannot be stopped.

Still, simply noticing this images-aren’t-me game might bring a little more sanity, a little less beating-up dislike of the self, a little more acceptance and awareness of all the pretend.

In either idealized direction.

So the next time you feel bad about yourself, watch the images that bubble up.

See what you're comparing yourself to. Look at the *I-Should-Be-That* images, and the *Oh-No-This-Is-Bad* images.

Notice that you are indeed comparing them, and measuring yourself by that comparison.

Notice the conclusions about who you are as a person, resulting from this comparing.

And then, notice you are noticing.

Not because it’s necessary.

But maybe because it can feel better to see that the “best-you” goal you’ve been striving for all along

is smoke and mirrors.

Maybe it can feel better to see a mirage for the not-real it is,

Rather than perpetually trying to reach

or become

something which

isn’t there.

RECOGNIZING THE SELF

April 18, 2023

I have inadvertently insulted people all my life. Not just because of my big mouth- which ok yes, has always been a factor too- but because I have facial recognition syndrome.**

I don't recognize people.

I have walked right past dear friends at parties, boyfriends on the dance floor, doctors helping my dying dad. I can't tell who's who in movies, can't find the waitress, can't identify partners with whom I've had a fabulous dance so we might later do it again.

This is entirely different from not remembering names- that almost universal thing which pretty much everyone, including probably you, experiences.

I literally do not know people at all.

Although, I'm not blind. I do see the body standing there.

I just don't connect it with the individual, the history. I just am not automatically plugged in to the story that face and body are supposed to represent.

Which can upset folks big time.

Because humans want our story known. That identity of who we are and how we are connected to other folks has been treasured and carefully maintained.

The separate self has been constantly confirmed.

And then along comes some weirdo who can't give us that.

It's upsetting.

Which is why it's been necessary for me to build up a lifetime of various strategies to cover over this condition of mine.

Because naturally I want to respect how dearly everyone clings to the identity that goes with that face and body.

Even while clearly seeing that the sense of self is so flimsy, so tenuous, that all it takes is one person out of the zillions we come across to not "know" us, and our hackles go up.

Meaning is attributed. Meaning about the apparent denier of their identity (moi)- how cold, how rude, how uninvolved, how unkind.

Meaning about themselves- how deficient, how not-enough, how unloved, how uncared-about.

All because *one person* walks by and doesn't acknowledge them.

As if, if any of us let up for half a moment, or someone doesn't do their part in the play-act,

the usual sense of me might go poof and disappear.

Which would not be cool.

Perhaps this is why most of us live a "Look at me!" life.

Look at my body, look at my accomplishments, look at my politics. Look at my rebellion, my beauty, my enlightenment, my wisdom.

Let me post wordy answers to life's important questions so you see me. Let me lose weight and look younger so I'm not invisible. Let me win a promotion, show you my new book, demonstrate my tennis prowess, perform this concert or dance. Look at my shyness, my shame, my fear in not leaving the house so this me can't be pinned down.

Even long-time seekers of the “ego-less state” are as much about “look at me” as everyone else.

Because it's through witnessing and observation that we verify and reify the me. Through good performance or bad, compliments or denigration- being seen confirms personhood.

We need to be seen as *something*.

Even if it's terrible and full of flaws, failure and ugliness.

Because something is better than nothing, and better than not existing.

Not existing is bad.

Says the non-existent, only-a-concept, ego.

Though ego is as much a part of existence as anything else, it’s not alive so it can’t die, and it’s not good or bad.

So there’s certainly no need to pretend that it needs anything.

And certainly no need to pretend ego wants to kill itself off.

I mean, as The Mind-Tickler has shown many times before, even Rupert-self is still here, Adya is still here, Mooji, Robert, Tony- they're all still here, all still persons, all still known, all still recognized.

In fact some of these folks actually seem quite eager to be seen.

So there’s not much point in fighting this. The desire to be seen is a basic of humanhood which is never going to change.

We may as well recognize that.

We may as well *look at it*.

Look at it shine, look at it fail, look at it lose, look at it love, look at it cry, look at it panic, look at it desire, look at it figure out consciousness. Look at

it perform, look at it mess up, look at it hide, look at it be.

Witness that person, that story, that self.

Again. Again. Again.

Look at it.

That's the game here.

Make believe is fun.

Everyone plays.

Even I,

Who sees the you, and sees the me,

And knows us both,

Even when my eyes

recognize

no one.

**About Prosopagnosia:

https://bit.ly/3jfXtPx

"A wise man, recognizing that the world is but an illusion, does not act as if it is real, so he escapes the suffering."

~Buddha

"He who knows himself has no doubts about it. Nor does he care whether others recognize his state or not."

~Nisargadatta

OBSTACLE THOUGHTS

April 25, 2023

"Thought can only create problems but it cannot help us solve the problems."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

Periodically I'm asked to write a Mind-Tickler that you can do something with.

Because despite all the discussions about how seeking is useless, you wouldn't mind being less triggered, less selfish, more confidant, more free, more enlightened. You wouldn't mind more understanding and knowing what you are or are not.

Perhaps you're certain that the right way is to be ok with everything as it is, but still, the imperfect, does-things-wrong self could use a bit of polishing up.

You want tools to make that happen.

Otherwise why bother with all those podcasts, therapies, inquiries, meditations, satsangs, and spiritual self-improvement books.

Why give a damn about free will, enlightenment, past traumas, or understanding past conditioning. Why care what consciousness is and where one's place is in it. Why care what the "point" is, either.

What's all that interest for, if not to improve, to feel more right and more complete.

After all, inadequacy, the sense of something missing, the sense of not good enough, the sense of “not there yet,” is build into the system of being a self.

There’s no way to be a person and feel complete. Since humans are not by any means all there is.

So the feeling of missing something, needing something, and not being enough is pretty much guaranteed.

Of course, you could just accept and get used to not ok-as-is. But you'd rather correct it, be a better person, feel good enough, and maybe even wake up while you're at it.

Which is fine. This is as good a way to spend a life, and experience, and be, as any other.

Since even seeking is included in the consciousness experience.

So in the interests of fun, since you’re going to improve and seek anyway, let's explore a few common obstacle-thoughts that might get in the way.

Not because they’re bad. Just because they are effectively diverting from where you say you want to go. And also because, why not.

In no particular order:

1- I already know this - or- I’ve heard this before.

Let’s say this is true. So what? Isn't it irrelevant? Can these delicate ears only take in unrepeated info which has never been encountered before? Where’s the problem in considering something again? Not to mention it’s more likely that it's parroted and someone else’s, not yours, anyway. So can you consider it anew?

2- I should be farther along than this- I should know this by now.

Why? Simply because you read it before, however many times? How does that become a rule for how "far along" you personally should be? And how do you know, what expert keeps the timetable?

3- This won't help me/do anything to change things.

As if thought knows, in advance, what will help you. Let's face it, if this was true, why hasn't thought stepped up already and taken care of things? What's it waiting for? Could it be it actually has no idea what will or won't help?

And when evaluation of success or failure happens before you even try, there's only one possible result, which just happens to confirm this thought.

If there's a thought saying, "I know this won't work because I've tried it before," consider the possibility that even then, this thought was running and you have never, in actuality, tried before. Where's the harm in trying again?

4- What can I do with this info?

If while you're experiencing something, you're trying to figure out how you can make use of it later, you're not really taking it in, you're strategizing before even fully getting the thing you're hoping to use. It doesn't matter what you do. Leave the doing to whatever is in charge of that.

5- Others don't have this problem.

Can you ever be certain that what others say and show you is all there is? Interesting how effectively and conveniently this comparison confirms your own inadequacy.

6- No one else has it this bad- no one understands me.

Yes because you're so complicated, and so special, so off-the-charts messed-up, that only you are, or can ever be, the problem. Only you, alone

in the universe in your badness. That sounds exactly like how existence and consciousness works, right? *(sarcasm)*

7- This is what I believe/ I don't believe this.

When considering something new, does it matter what you believe already? How can anything new get past this? Maybe you don't have to believe in order to consider something else. Maybe you can look at it, consider, and throw it away later if you still want to.

8- What's the point?

Ah yes, mind's favorite last resort. What wants and needs a point in order to think about something in a new way? What needs to have a point at all, in order to exist?

So there you go. A few thoughts to play with.

For fun. For novelty. For curiosity.

Do you have to do something with them, get somewhere with them?

Of course not.

The self's imperfections, and not-getting-its, and wanting something differents, and inadequacies will continue, regardless.

Nothing wrong with that.

Nothing wrong either, though,

with looking at obstacles in a new way,

and maybe even occasionally

getting

what you want.

Because it could just be that

there's no obstacle

even to that.

YOUR VALIDATION

May 2, 2023

"And so at times we talk, and I pretend to take your struggles seriously, just as I pretended to take my own seriously. Although we pretend, we really shouldn't forget that we are pretending, that we are making up the content of our experience; we are making up the little dramas of our lives."

~Adyashanti

Occasionally a client accuses me of invalidating them.

To be fair, usually I'm thinking, "Yay!" when that happens.

Because yes, hopefully so.

But no, they don't like it. They want to be validated, not invalidated.

As most likely you do too.

Validate: To confirm, endorse, establish, legitimize. To make valid. (Merriam Webster)

As in, not valid already, and needs to be made valid.

Suffering, panic, tears, the trauma that has sucked up huge amounts of time trying to get over- that's what is supposed to be validated.

Y'know, by moi, and others.

Because you can't make yourself valid, right? It requires someone outside, somehow,

to legitimize feelings you yourself hate and desperately want to go away.

I'm just not quite clear why anybody would want that.

I'm also not clear about how this works, exactly.

I mean, would a sympathetic, "There, there, honey," legitimize a person or feeling? "I understand your pain? I'm sorry you're hurting?"- would that do it?

Do what, exactly?

Provide a warm and fuzzy feeling for a bit? What wants or needs that?

Besides, what do those handful of words above actually make valid? Feelings? Story? Past trauma? Self? How is confirming any of that, desirable?

Seems something much prefers to hold onto crappy feelings, verifying and validating of them, than to risk losing them.

Ah yes. Of course.

The self hates being invalidated.

After all, invalidate it now and the next thing you know, it might be seen to be not there at all.

Which is not ok.

Well, to the non-existent self, anyway.

Better to confirm that sucker. Better to make a precious space for it with soothing words, lots of hugs, and a generous supply of tissues.

Better to validate it.

Because validation holds the sense of self in place. Validation equals confirmation. Confirmed selves feels real. Real is greatly preferred to not-real, when it comes to the sense of self.

Now that's something you can like.

It’s just that it’s never enough.

I mean, if, “I feel your pain” actually succeeded in achieving true contentment, then your friendly Mind-Tickler would be whole-heartedly saying those words nonstop.

Instead it’s unending therapy and inquiry and sitting with feelings and embodiment and group connectivity classes.

Because the self, whatever it is, has never been satisfied with any amount of validation it has managed to get.

The longing for endorsement has been pretty much bottomless. It feels nice for a while, and then soon enough you want more again.

Which makes sense. After all, no corroboration can ever make what's not-there, there.

So maybe the next time someone appears to invalidate you, maybe just for fun, for curiosity, for novelty,

you might check to see if what you need in that moment is actually validation.

Even if it feels strongly like you want it.

Because it could turn out that no one ever needs validation of fairy tales.

It could turn out that you feel much better not holding so tightly to that validated self.

And it could turn out that you get more of what you actually want

By invalidating validation.

Perhaps more than any, “There there honey, I feel your pain”

And box of tissues

will ever provide.

ABOUT YOU, PERSONALLY

May 9, 2023

Well! That was an interesting experience.

Many lovely readers of last week's Mind-Tickler about validation became absolutely, positively, most definitely convinced it was written about you.

Y'know, you personally.

Which was not the case. Saying again for those in the back-

it was not about you.

Not that you'll believe me.

You're quite certain I invalidated you, specifically, by writing a general email about validation.

Interesting that that particular topic sparked so much betrayal, hurt, anger, and unsubscribes.

The topic of Validating the Self caused hot feelings, walls, and defenses to rise up in a big way.

Let's face it, you want that darned self validated, dammit.

In every moment, by everyone you come across.

Everyone needs to legitimize you, your okness, your painful feelings, your trauma, your choices, your personality, your likes and dislikes.

Otherwise there's risk of discovering, over and over and over, that that treasured and protected self/ego/ person doesn't exist and is therefore

not possible to validate.

The self would very much prefer to not acknowledge this.

So instead, everything is perceived through the lens, the filter, of- *Is this about me? Can this be made personal?*

Making all outside circumstances and other people's opinions usable, in order to define… you.

In fact, if something can not be made personal, then there's no concern about it. There's no interest in anything that has nothing to do with you.

If it *is* personal though, then it better be right. Otherwise there'll be hell to pay.

In the form of bad feelings.

One can be made happy or sad or angry depending on whether someone or something verifies you "properly."

Almost as if what happens out there actually, repeatedly, perpetually, creates you.

Hmmm. Perhaps it's starting to become clear why last week's Mind-Tickler may have been upsetting to you.

Perhaps it's starting to become clear why being validated feels so important. Or why it feels so painful and infuriating if said validation doesn't happen.

The appearance of existence and survival of the self depends on being confirmed by others.

The last Tickler felt very personal and didn't verify the "right" you.

We understand this here at Mind-Tickler headquarters.

And we understand that your self has a right to its preferences and attempts at survival, and a right to want what it wants.

Whether Ticklers say the right things, liked things, or not.

We also understand that none of this can be helped, and that not one bit of this is important to see or understand.

Ever.

And though we can't always soothe the savage Self-beast, and can't always tickle it into having peaceful feelings,

hopefully you can know that The Mind-Tickler is always written with the You in mind, anyway.

Your likes, dislikes and strategies. Your self, your being, your existence.

You are always front and center.

Every Mind-Tickler is about what you really are, and whatever may stand in the way of knowing what that is.

Even if they may not be about your self,

personally.

That, at least, is something we can

validate.

FINDERS SEEKERS

May 16, 2023

"A policeman sees a drunk searching for something under a streetlight and asks what the drunk has lost. He says he lost his keys. They both look under the streetlight together. After a few minutes the cop asks if the man if he is sure he lost them here, and the drunk replies, “No, I lost them in the park.” The policeman asks, “So why are you searching here?” And the drunk replies, "Because this is where the light is."

~Nasreddin

"Streetlight effect: when people only search for something where it is easiest to look."

~Wikipedia

You been told you shouldn’t, it’s not the thing to do, it isn’t helpful, doesn’t work. You’ve been told how things should be instead. And you agree.

But you can’t help it, can’t stop. You need your fix.

You’re seeking. Looking for something.

Enlightenment, awakening, bliss, peace, realization, getting it.

You want to understand, make things quieter, shut up the mind, sit with feelings so that they’ll finally exit and leave you with nothing but calm and

bliss.

So you meditate, listen to podcasts, read the latest book, make yourself sleepy with you-tube videos at night.

Listening to all those teachers say there's no you and it's already here and there's nothing to find and this is it. Saying, "It's all one" and there's no separation and you are experience.

Surely if you seek out the right teacher, the right method or guide… you can have what they have someday.

While they tell you there's no point in seeking.

"This is it. There's nothing to 'get'." --Tony Parsons

And the more you listen, the more convinced you become that they are the key to finally getting what they have. Because they can't all be liars, right?

Still…

"Nirvana is a radical transformation of how it feels to be alive: it feels as if everything were myself, or as if everything---including "my" thoughts and actions---were happening of itself. There are still efforts, choices, and decisions, but not the sense that "I make them"; the freest of my actions just happens like hiccups inside me or like a bird singing outside me." --Alan Watts

Come on, who wouldn't want that? Sounds great!

Have you noticed that listening to any of these teachers makes you want understanding, even more? Some you-tube video says, "There's nothing to seek," and boom. You want.

Although, seeking is a whole nuther thing than finding.

To find, you have to know it when you see it.

Which you're pretty sure you do. So you go looking, under the teacher's street light.

But…

"What we are seeking is already here." –Alan Watts

If this is true, then you've already got it. In which case there's no need to seek, under Alan's light or anywhere else.

And if you're looking for something that's already here, then you actually don't know it when you see it.

Besides, where is this lovely promised Nirvana? What has to be done to get some?

"There's a point when you intuitively realize that to be Free you have to give up your attachment to Freedom. You have to decide to never look over your shoulder again to see if you're Free or if others know you're Free." --Adyashanti

Okay!

"*Stop searching, cease losing. Stop misusing your mind and all will be well with you. You need not set it right, it will set itself right, as soon as you give up all concern with the past and the future and live entirely in the now." --Nisargadatta*

Ugh.

Those statements just make you want IT, whatever IT is, while telling you not to seek IT.

Though really it's kind of funny. After all, if this is IT, then seeking is too.

I mean,

"We live indirectly, but even indirect living is 'it'. --Wu Wei Wu

But...

“What was never lost can never be found.” –Nisargadatta

Dammit.

The teacher system keeps you coming back, keeps you admiring others for their wondrous experiences, and keeps the self feeling incomplete and missing out.

So that even more seeking is necessary in order to someday complete you.

Thereby never noticing your own adequacy and enoughness.
Because you want to be the one who understands and knows and arrives. And the self can never be the one that does that.

“The goal is often expressed as the very cessation of the seeker who cherishes the day when he arrives at the goal - maybe you can sense the irony.” -- Night Sky Sangha

So seeking will always be a losing game.

Because what is being sought is you.

“The seeker is the sought.” --Paul Hedderman

And that’s already here,

you’re already "there."

So it turns out,

you don’t need no stinking streetlight

at all.

"That guy who's telling you not to use your head sounds like a flimflam man selling you a timeshare in paradise. And now look at the absolute failure of human spirituality to help anyone realize truth and see if you can draw a connection between those two things; between these purveyors of delusion that send everyone in exactly the wrong direction and the perfect failure of seekers to find the only thing that can never be lost."

~Jed McKenna

REAL REALITY

May 23, 2023

"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."

~Albert Einstein

"If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, did it make a sound?"

~Anonymous

My client says, “What do you mean, *The world is an illusion?* Are you saying that tree is not real? I’m looking right at it.”

Yes, everyone knows there are actual things out there, right? Tree, car, house, other people. Real you, sitting at real desk, looking at real screen. DUH.

Reality exists. Everyone knows this.

So let’s take a moment to notice *how* this is known.

You know there’s a tree because you- *you*- can see it. You can touch it. You can hear it.

Color and shape is happening in your personal eyeballs, sensation is happening in your personal fingertips, sound is happening in your personal

ears.

You can know with certainty that objects exist because your own senses say so.

Although that makes whatever is perceived, personal to you. That's your sky, your tree, your red or blue or green.

Right there, in your body, literally within your own sensory apparatus.

And there's no way to know or confirm if your reality, and your tree, is the same as anyone else's. Even if they say it is.

Since perceiving is an individual experience.

And then, based on those perceptions, you extrapolate that objects are outside your eyeballs or ears, independent of you, and always there, whether you are or not.

Thereby creating a solid world full of things, a world that is not you.

Turns out what is called "reality" is not static, not objective, not outside of, or independent of, the body, and not the same no matter who perceives it.

Rather, it's subjective, biased, filtered, and changing, based on each person's experience and hardware.

Uh oh.

That's not "reality." That's just a point of view.

Humans have taken something decentralized, variable, and unique within each of the billions and billions of individual sets of eyeballs and ears, and instead,

Pretended, actually insisted, that objects are outside the apparatus that sees them.

Fixed, unchanging, and always there, always the same, for everyone.

Perhaps you can see how solid and real this mental sleight of hand manages to make the sense of self?

Because when the world cannot be proven to exist except in your own experience,

When there's no provable physical matter, only some very personal-to-you-alone perceptions,

Then everything, absolutely everything that can be known, thought, or counted on,

Everything that's real,

depends on you.

There's no reality without the self.

Which means- there's no reality.

Because that self-thingy is also dependent on smoke and mirrors.

Ugh. Ok fine, then what's the point?

The point is you, experiencing.

The point is the ride, riding on you.

The point is consciousness, experiencing through your hardware.

Only you. Only your way.

That actually might make you really important.

And maybe even

as real as it gets.

FLAWED YOU

May 30, 2023

A few years back, preparing to move cross-country and hoping to reduce the amount of stuff going with me, I held a yard sale.

One of the things I offered was a small, hand-created, wooden folk-art pig. *(Doesn't everyone have one of these?)*

The little guy had never been perfect; being handmade, he had peculiarities. Also somewhere in my ownership, he had fallen in an earthquake and gotten a crack over one ear.

No one bought him.

Which wasn't a big surprise.

After all, he was flawed.

Humans are not impressed with flaws. We don't like them in others. We despise them in ourselves.

Even though this, *Flawed is bad* point of view has made so many lives a full-on misery of self-dissatisfaction.

I mean, look at *you* for example, sitting there all cracked and weird.

Look at that quick anger, those unloving judgments, the depressions, the secret shames. *(What, you thought you were the only one?)* Watch you yell at the kids, make mistakes, or freeze in order to not make any. Watch you eat too much, drink too much, avoid too much, be lazy too much.

Anxious, disapproving, unproductive, addicted, guilty, regretful, you.

Which, when you think about it, might actually be kind of funny. Because what is a “flaw” anyway? What determines that it's a flaw?

After all, does perfection exist in any living thing? Anywhere?

Does a lawn full of grass blades not include brown spots, curled edges, holes and bumps?

Where was it decided that brown spots equal imperfect?

Maybe our certainty that we know what imperfection is, is confused.

Because you know what grass would be without all those "flaws?"

Astro-turf.

So-called defects are what separate life from plastic.

Life, in every form, comes with irregularities, blemishes and shortcomings.

Existence celebrates those irregularities.

Requires them actually.

How do we know flaws are required? Because imperfections are the only option. Nothing else exists.

Nature creates all these infinite configurations and varieties of experience, and then humans, with our delightful humility, come along and say, “No no no! That’s broken and bad!”

And we get to fixing, smoothing, therapizing, inquiring and satsanging.

Seems this wacky human species only wants sameness and duplication.

As if Barbie is somehow better than a real girl.

As if sameness is ideal rather than dull, tedious, monotonous.

So for a bit of new fresh thinking, we might start with checking whether what we think of as flaws, are actually flaws.

Y'know, as opposed to treasures.

We might consider whether our unwanted reactions and despised peculiarities actually need standardizing,

or whether they offer a unique, valued and valuable contribution to the consciousness experience.

Distinguishing us from lifeless, duplicatable, always identical, plastic.

It could be that our ADHD, or discomfort in social situations, or recurrent worrying, or kooky sexual preference, might be something to be esteemed instead of hidden, appreciated instead of fixed and whitewashed.

We may have had it wrong all this time.

It may be worth considering the usually rejected possibility that…

There's nothing wrong with us.

And that not matching the ideal is the ideal.

Alive, odd, wrong, unfixed, us.

Like an artful little cracked pig…

Beautiful and interesting

with its flaws.

Because of its flaws.

Perfect.

SEEKER'S DREAM

June 6, 2023

"Unless you make tremendous efforts, you will not be convinced that effort will take you nowhere."

~Nisargadatta

"The search for the unknown is absurd. How can I search for what I do not know? Whatever I seek, is a thing which I have already known or experienced. So seeking is running away from the actual, real life. This is the real life. THAT is the unreal."

~U.G. Krishnamurti (slightly edited)

"Reality and completeness are in plain sight. Absolute completeness surrounds you wherever you go. We humans have long ago deceived ourselves into such a confined tangle of confusion and disarray that we scarcely even consider, much less experience for ourselves, the divinity within and all around us."

~Adyashanti

"The Truth is only Here and Now,
but the search says it is tomorrow."

~Papaji

The lovely young woman is pretty sure she had an enlightenment experience, evidenced by feeling some peace and contentment for a while. Then that went away. She wants more.

The man is all over social media asking people how to get enlightened. He receives answers, and then argues with those answers. He remains in search of his permanent bliss.

The depressed man back-burners his sadness, preferring to urgently look for the face of God in his mirror.

It's not news that people are obsessed with attaining the enlightenment dream.

It feels necessary.

The life that's here feels not right. Enlightenment is expected to fix that.

Though the God-face already in the mirror is the same face which allows all the current non-blissful suffering, fear, and not-ok-ness to exist in the first place.

It seems when folks expect rightness to look identical to their preferences, they may not notice that God is already in the mirror.

Plus, when only bliss will do, that God/ consciousness starts to look mistake-prone. It hasn't gotten things correct yet, and keeps coming up with more suffering.

So maybe that divinity isn't even worth chasing for a whole lifetime...

given how much of what it produces is not even wanted.

So, perhaps most seekers actually have no interest in finding God/ existence/ consciousness, awareness, as it is.

Maybe they just want to feel better.

I mean, they do continue to hunt until they get their bliss. Maybe that's all they want.

To hell with the vast amount of non-bliss.

And maybe they just want to have liked experiences. Maybe they just want to control what happens to them and their loved ones, and to control what they are forced to experience, so as to not have their feelings be at the mercy of life's vagaries.

Although, the search for bliss starts to sound a whole lot like traditional religious ideas of heaven, only transferred to different words and contexts.

Do everything right- pray or meditate or inquire or follow the right guru or find the path- and voila!

Just rewards.

Welcome to Heaven. Welcome to constant enlightenment. Welcome to perfect happiness.

But here's the thing...

What has to happen to the earthly human self, in order for it to get into heaven?

It has to die first.

Are all those seekers in such a hurry to obliterate the self? Are they such eager fans of Nothing?

Because that's what's left once the self is seen through.

Not the grand satisfaction of having all the happiness and lack of pain the ego can possibly crave. Not the making of a better, happier, experience, for a personality.

Turns out no one can get the dissolving individuality they supposedly want, while also keeping the individual sense of self intact, distinct, and separate.

Bliss is for the person.

And Heaven requires the non-person.

As in, gone.

As in, absorbed into the vast collective nothingness, non-self.

And aw hell, not even guaranteed the bliss.

Good lord, no thanks.

Of course most spiritual seekers have no interest in that kind of loss. They want the custom-made, tailored to the likings of their individual self, all-pervasive gain.

Even though enlightenment is not in the business of acquiring
the perfect, hoped-for dream life.

Instead, it does the opposite- it takes away the dream.

Still though, it remains clear and perhaps unavoidable, that seekers gotta seek, anyway.

Sometimes for a very long while. Sometimes for a whole lifetime, never catching the sunbeams.

And who is anyone to keep them from that?

No one, that's who.

Luckily, existence /God/ consciousness does not owe any person any particular kind of experience.

So it includes the yearning, the dissatisfaction, the misery and empty incompleteness, of seeking.

Because it's a completeness which includes incompleteness.

So, seek.

Or don't.

Either is good.

Both are included.

And then who knows, maybe after the efforting time has been put in, and the individual seeker is finally t. i. r. e. d…

maybe the desire for attainment will make sense to revisit.

What Is will still be What Is, even after the rainbow is chased to exhaustion.

Long after any one seeker discovers

that there is no horizon to reach

and that there is no self to reach it,

or to attain

enlightenment.

> "At its core, self is nothing but a contraction of emptiness. Ultimately, we transcend this primal gut level self-contraction by being willing to allow the separate-self sense to die. This is what it means to die before

you die so that you can truly live....Nothing will have changed, except everything. And you will then simply go on about your life."

~Adyashanti

"I meet a lot of people who think they are enlightened and awake simply because they had a moving spiritual experience. They wear their enlightenment on their sleeve like a badge of honor. But if you feel special in any way, then enlightenment has not occurred.

The funny thing about enlightenment is that there is no one to claim it. Enlightenment is very ordinary; it is nothing special. When you are enlightened the whole notion of someone who is enlightened is a big joke. Do not get stuck in enlightenment."

~Adyashanti

"Stop your search, simply be Quiet."

~Papaji

THE INNER VOICE

June 13, 2023

"The mean voice says, 'You're just a little upstart, just a creature, and you had better learn your place.' But it's lying. Because, on the contrary, you are IT."

~Alan Watts

"Words are of the mind and the mind obscures and distorts. Hence the absolute need to go beyond words."

~Nisargadatta

Recently a client told me during their session that they were silently thinking, “This is stupid, it won't work, it's a waste of time, I already know this.”

Three hours later, the same person wrote to let me know that their mind was strangely quiet and they were feeling great.

Ah yes, you gotta love the mind’s inner voice.

So knowledgeable. So sage. Such an expert on everything.

So imaginary.

I mean, a lot has been written elsewhere about this inner voice and what it supposedly is.

Yet we can see there's nothing provably there. Nothing with an actual voicebox, nothing which shows up on an MRI, nothing anyone but ourselves can hear.

So herewith we shall call this inner voice, "Harvey," the invisible, 6-foot movie-rabbit.**

Because an inner voice which tells us regularly what's wrong with us, and knows everything about the past, and everything about the future - sure, sure, that's real.

Though it does *feel* real. And it's so chatty, so free with its opinions. Constantly informing us that we blew it, or we're unkind, or unloved, or crazy. Constantly informing us that there's something wrong with us, doom is coming, and there's no hope.

It's amazing we listen to it at all, considering how mean it is.

Perhaps that's partly because, right or wrong, it brings receipts. Selectively leaving out any evidence which doesn't support its theories, it says, "See? Remember when you did this, remember when you said that? See? See how they hated you? That was your doing, your fault. Because you're Cah-RA-ZEEEE."

And just like that, it sums us up.

Most folks don't notice that the inner Harvey *(if there is an outer Harvey please contact your doctor. That's just taking this imaginary friend business too far)* always summarizes up its bullying commentary with a definition... of who we are.

As a person.

"You're messed up." You are a weak, stupid, loser."

The "me' is labeled and defined. Through Harvey.

Gosh thanks, invisible rabbit.

This is exactly what that voice is for- to evaluate us and identify us as separate, unique individuals. It makes us feel real.

It doesn't make us *actually* real. Just makes us *feel like* it.

Because of course, no not-really-there-voice can make any person actually exist.

Meanwhile, have we not noticed that this voice says the exact same things, with the exact same words, to millions, maybe even billions, of others? "You made a mistake. You should know better. You are damaged, broken, crazy. You are a bad person."

How can a voice which says the same stuff to everyone prove our own individual existence?

If those definitions of us aren't even about us in particular, then none of the name-calling is personal.

That's just Harvey reciting a script.

Which means it doesn't know us. It only knows its script.

Despite calling us names, *the voice has no idea who we are*.

It gets weirder though. Because defining-us Harvey is somehow also supposed to *be* us. It's *us,* supposedly talking to ourselves.

Sure, sure, that makes sense, to be both speaker and listener, talking to our self nonstop.

And then also, that voice *belongs* to us. As in, *This is MY inner voice. MINE.*

Though why we would want to own a pet bully, I have no idea.

So it seems we believe we are simultaneously 1) the voice, 2) the creator of the voice, 3) the thing the voice is talking *about,* and 4) its owner.

Which makes about as much sense as a 6-foot rabbit.

Of course there's not much we can do about this. Harvey has been talking and defining humans for thousands of years. He's not about to shut up now.

So maybe instead we could consider… If we're not whatever that bodiless voice says we are, and if we're not Harvey, and if we're not the owner of Harvey,

Who are we? What are we?

Without that voice defining and insisting,

Well, we... don't know.

We are dependent on Harvey to know our selves.

Luckily maybe we don't need to know. Luckily maybe we can just notice that the rabbit says its lines, and something seems to hear it.

Something is aware of it.

And whatever that is, if we just feel into it without thinking too much- is that hearer broken, flawed, crazy?

If we had to choose, which is closer to what we really are- Harvey or the hearer (if either)?

Maybe we can play with trusting that.

Without even having to know what it is.

Anymore than we currently know what the inner voice actually is.

Because Don't-know is kinder. Don't-know is un-blaming. Don't-know is open and spacious.

And paying some attention to what hears rather than what speaks,

is far more sane,

and far more peaceful,

than lugging around and feeding some mean, bullying

imaginary rabbit.

** *HARVEY:*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_(1950_film)

"There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen."

~Rumi

"Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment."

~Rumi

RESISTANCE

June 20, 2023

"The completely open heart embraces life as it is, not what could or should be."

~Adyashanti

"We miss What-Is due to a lack of attention.
Instead, we create something else using excessive imagination."

~Wu Hsin

Once upon a time, the instant I hit a still-single 30 years old, the pressure to marry- from family, friends, strangers, professionals, and coworkers- increased exponentially.

The problem had two names. “Judy,” and, “Resistance.”

Judy was resistant to happiness, to all the great guys out there, to marriage, and to a normal lifestyle. For whatever much-theorized, deep-seated, needed-healing reason.

This was everyone’s belief including mine.

So at 31, I forced myself to stop resisting everyone’s idea of how my life should go, and got married.

Guess how that worked out.

Fast forward to all these years later, and now I see *you* out there, "resisting" various obligations in your own life.

Trying to coerce yourself into following the meal plan, not smoking, exercising, doing the paperwork, the writing, the meditation. Nagging yourself to get out of the house, socialize, or cross something, *anything,* off the to-do list.

Trying to figure out *whyyyyy* you don't do that stuff, trying to find strategies to make yourself do it, itemizing the many supposed consequences if you don't get it right and finally behave.

Instead of noticing, for a start, that you only resist musts, shoulds, have-tos, and supposed obligations.

After all, everyone knows, with absolute and unquestioned certainty, what your life should properly look like, what you absolutely must do or not do, and what is Good For You.

And there's no acceptable "no" to What's Good For You.

And yet somehow a big, fat, not-allowed, "no" exists anyway.

Which no amount of resisting resistance changes into acceptance.

What a no-win conundrum.

Enter guilt, shame, self-disgust, failure, therapy, and spiritual seeking.

So let's get honest for a change. Perhaps the problem is not some deep-seated (in you, of course) issue named Resistance.

Perhaps there's not even a problem at all.

Perhaps you simply *don't want to*.

You don't want to get married, cut carbs, do the taxes, fold the laundry, stop drinking. You don't want to do what the guru says, share your deepest fears with some group of total strangers, or do whatever is being asked in order to get over "trauma."

Hellooooo. You. do. not. want. to.

And then you might notice that this not-wanting-to can't be helped or controlled or stopped.

Because preferences happen *to* you. They're not your fault or doing.

I mean, if that power had ever been yours, you'd have made your "wants" into something more acceptable ages ago. If you could have stopped it, you would have.

So when we say your "don't wants" are a problem that it's up to you to fix, we're attributing far more power and control to the self than it actually has.

We're also saying existence is stupid and wrong.

So perhaps instead, consider renaming Resistance to the far-truer, "Don't want to."

I hope you'll try this on. Because that rename comes with surprises.

That rename reveals that the same exact life you currently have, with no changes whatsoever, might be easier, lighter, freer, just by seeing that you're allowed, even encouraged by existence, to want whatever has come to you to want.

Through no fault of your own.

That rename reveals that you're allowed, even encouraged by existence, to live a life that doesn't look like everyone else's.

After all, does existence show any interest in *everyone* being thin, healthy, successful, social? Does existence show any interest in every human living until an energetic 95, while feeling only good feelings?

Life has different ideas, preferences, and desired outcomes than us wacky humans.

Existence might even know what it's doing.

Even when *what it's doing* sometimes shows up as cravings for wine, or isolation, or unhappiness and tears.

Or "resistance."

Because just like acceptance and doing-things-"right"-according-to-humans is What Is,

Resistance is also *What Is*. Resisting resistance is also *What Is*. Don't-want-to, is also *What Is*.

Just as much as acceptance or proper behavior.

Equally.

And who knows,

maybe being married to that

will turn out to be something we can accept

without resistance.

-ACCEPTANCE-

June 27, 2023

"Thy will, not mine, be done."

~Jesus

"They pray to God and finish with, 'Thy Will be done!'
If His Will be done, why do they pray at all?"

~Ramana Maharshi

Every once in a while, my work and personal life intersect.

It's always tricky when that happens because generally, my friends and family have little to no interest in the weird stuff I do for a living and my even weirder points of view. *(There is no self! You don't exist! You are literally everything! There is no world!)*

So I giggled when I saw someone in a Facebook dancers' group ask if anyone else is unable to shut up their head or shift negative commentary, and as a result have bad dances and competitions.

Adorably, the writer thought they might be the only one, or one of very few, experiencing this thinking problem. Not realizing that the mind works the same way for everyone.

At some point, no matter who you are, thought helpfully says you're a not-good-enough, bad, needs-improvement, faker. At some point, thought helpfully says, "You need to stop thinking these things and just think good things about yourself all the time!"

I mean, even supposedly more evolved, spiritually-minded folks say: "Being in your head is bad! Don't be in your head!"

So whether it's work, dance, tennis, golf, art, music, writing, making a speech, or enlightenment- everyone has times when they're negatively in their head.

These are called "Bad Days." Bad Days are not ok. Everyone wants to make them stop.

Which is why, on that dancer's post, there were hundreds of sweetly encouraging comments offering favorite ways to fix this terrible problem.

Positive affirmations, mindfulness, therapy, meditation, allowed to be not-good sometimes, weed, alcohol, not caring what others think, changing up this or that technique, picturing others naked, remembering it's supposed to be fun.

Strategies. To take one's mind off. To turn that nasty head around. To change thought.

In order to get outcomes and consequences you like.

Only.

As if liking what happens is a necessity. *Required,* even.

Somehow not noticing that all these wonderful strategies only work *sometimes*. They're not a sure thing. All anyone can do is cross fingers that they'll work this time.

Sometimes no matter what you do, you still can't make the tennis ball behave. Sometimes yesterday's great painting gets ruined by today's off

day. Sometimes you bomb in concert in front of everyone with music that went beautifully in rehearsal just hours ago.

Clearly, *when* you're able to make liked-results happen is not up to you. If it was, your fixes would work every time.

So if *WHEN* bad days happen is not up to you, how can *making them stop* be up to you?

Though of course you”ll keep trying.

Because iI’s never occurred to you to accept the off day and negative thoughts. To say *yes* to bad results, losing, and blowing it.

"Hi paint brush, dance partner, pool team, golf crew, tennis partner. I’m having an off day today, I’m all in my head, I might suck at this. I’m pretty sure we’ll live though. Here we go. One awful speech dance painting essay tennis billiards game coming right up.”

Now probably, reading this, your mind screams, "*NOOOO!*" and goes instantly to *Don’t-like! Not OK! Consequences! What will others think!*

And still the outcome will be whatever it is, regardless.

So it might be easier on you to try accepting your offness and badness for a change.

Because are you never allowed to be less than great, even less than adequate? Is it never ok for people to have bad thoughts about you (assuming they bother?)

Never?

Only good days and great performances for you in this lifetime?

Permission and acceptance to be awful in that moment (regardless of whether it's actually true) might make for a whole lot better experience than the stress, failure, and gritted teeth of impossibly trying to force only-liked outcomes.

Things might even start to be humorous, downright *light*, as you mess things up with your terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad, day.

Now before you start to lecture your friendly Mind-Tickler, yes of course, trying to accept is also an attempt at doing and controlling, also an attempt to manipulate outcome to get what you want.

But c'mon let's face it, you're going to bother trying something to get what you want, anyway. Why not try the one thing you haven't yet?

Because insisting you never have an in-your-head game, day, or week is simply not a viable plan. It's unreliable.

And fighting *What Is* is hard, self-centered, self-reifying, self-important, life-screwing work.

Realizing this can drop self-hatred and angst. Because none of how things go is your fault or doing.

You still may suck.

But oh well. You can handle that.

We all do. Since no one is promised only liked happenings in this life.

So. In-your-head, crappy player, dancer, presenter, writer, painter?

Why yes.

Imperfect, messed up, not good enough?

Yep.

Don't like.

For sure.

So be it.

So what.

IN THE NOW?

July 4, 2023

"When I allow it, it is, when I avoid it, it is."

~Tony Parsons

There it was-- a totally serious and earnest post begging for help to be in the now.

Wherever this poster was, the now was not the state they were in.

Maybe Florida, or Oklahoma.

It was a problem. The now was missing, whereabouts unknown.

Yooo hooo…. The noooowwww…

The post was touching in its sincerity. Perhaps that's why 140 commenters had sage advice to help this person finally get to where they wanted to be.

For example:

"Pain is necessary to know the now." Oh yay! BDSM spirituality.

"Your mind takes you out of it." Ah. Takes you to where? No info provided.

"Snap a rubber band whenever you leave the now." Is that like Dorothy clicking her heels? "There's no place like the now."

"You need proper training. Message me." Yep. New-client-scoring opportunity- check.

“Watch your breath.“ This was by far the most popular advice and strategy for proper now-ness.

Though “watching” the breath, a form of meditation that many have at some point attempted, is extremely uninteresting to the mind. The mind is totally bored by presence.

Which is why, seconds after moving focus to the breath, attention shifts to figuring out how to solve life's problems- maybe get more money or a better relationship or a plan for dinner.

This was apparently what this poster above was experiencing. Their mind wandered, as minds do.

The poster took that to mean they’d left the now.

Because for them and so many commenters, the now only happens with human attention. Take eyes off it for a second, and boom! Now is out the door again. So it needs rubber bands and pain and reminders to make it stick around.

As if the human mind, the very same one that skitters quickly away from the now, is the only thing that can actually hold the now in place.

Which of course makes no sense, though it is the common wisdom.

People mistake human *attention*, focus, for the now. They think they’re the same thing.

Meanwhile, why do people even want to be in the now, anyway? What for?

There are only 3 reasons anyone would care.
They want to feel better.
They want in on some amazing experience they’ve heard about but seem left out of, and/or
They want to do the right thing, be good, live right.
Being in the now has become a requirement, a rule or strategy, for the right way to live.

As if there is such a thing.

And as if focus on the present moment is the only approved option. Focus on anything else is just wrong.

So when existence has the nerve to provide some other focus, like perhaps running thoughts about work or a "bad" feeling, humans say, “No no no, that’s not right.”

Which is peculiar.

Because even the scampering mind is happening now.

No matter what it is attending to, no matter what it is thinking about.

Thinking about the breath, thinking about day to day life, thinking about feelings- same.

All happening now, all included in now.

Though that desired attention on the approved right subjects might actually serve a purpose, too. Since it leaves us more aware of the self, rather than less.

Focus on the breath of the me, the in-the-now of the me, discounts all of existence’s infinite *other* options.

Which is kind of small. Kind of me-centered. Kind of self-conscious. Kind of all about the self and how it’s doing.

I mean, if one wants to do things right…

that might not be it.

Because clearly the now is already here. All the time. There’s nothing else. It can’t go anywhere. There’s nothing outside it.

The now certainly does not need humans to pay attention to it.

Which is another way of saying, “This is it.” And is as now as it gets.

The poster asking for help above simply hadn't noticed they already had all the now they could ever want.

Right now.

So... what now?

Laughter. Crying. Dinner. Poverty. Thinking. Meditating. Pain. Desires. Sunshine.

And the cliché-because-it’s-the-only-option-no-matter-what-is-happening

of

Now. Now. Now.

"The fish, searching for water, can never find it, although it is immersed in it."

~Rupert Spira

"Everything is Now."

~Alan Watts

LIKED FEELINGS

July 11, 2023

"The coyote never has a bad day. Neither does the coyote have a good day. Hungry all day is not a bad day. Napping all day full of rabbit is not a good day. Because the coyote has no judgment. He does not evaluate. No "good for me, bad for me". People are the only ones who evaluate, and they never stop. Without judgment we would become like the coyote. Our capacity to enjoy would be shrunk along with our capacity to worry. How endlessly engaging and thrilling and glorious it is to let things matter when we have finally judged that they truly don't."

~Fred Knipe

"Bliss is for children. Bliss is for tourists. Do you really think spiritual enlightenment is going to be like an endless orgasm? A permanent high? Heaven on earth? No more problems, no more worries, just sitting around HAPPY all the time? Doesn't that sound a little sleazy? Like all we're really doing here is trying to cop a great buzz? Bliss is just the heaven myth repackaged for a slightly hipper crowd; heaven on earth, heaven here and now. It's really too silly to talk about."

~Jed McKenna

You experience a feeling. An emotion.

Not just a feeling but a *bad* feeling.

Anxiety depression shame humiliation guilt regret confusion apathy boredom.

What makes it bad?

Well, you don't like it.

In this world, *Don't Like* equals bad. Whether you like what you feel or not is how you evaluate things.

--Love, happiness, compassion: good day, good happenings, more please.
--Fear, sadness, shame: bad day, bad happenings, please may it never happen again.

Life is completely owned by your likes and dislikes.

As if, when you were born, existence made some kind of promise and in this life, you (along with 8 billion others) were to be owed good feelings and good happenings, liked feelings and liked happenings. *Only.*

And as if, if that doesn't happen, it's somehow a problem.

So naturally you are obsessed with how you feel.

I mean, obsessed.

Obsessed with checking and evaluating feelings. Obsessed with sorting them into categories of liked or disliked. Obsessed with trying very hard to experience only enjoyed ones.

Which is kind of funny really. Because while you're trying very hard to get feelings you want, you don't actually pay much attention to them when you have them.

After all, nothing needs to be done with a good feeling. It's already good. There's nothing that needs doing there.

Bad reactions, on the other hand, now there's something for thought to work with.

Disliked feelings are a mind's dream.

What caused them, what they mean about you, what they mean about your past, what they mean about your future, what to do about them, how to stop them, how to fix them, how to transform them into bliss or happiness or contentment.

Trying meditation, therapy, medication, inquiry, listening to or "sitting with" disliked feelings so that they'll either go away forever, or shift into a more wanted experience.

All that thinking keeps mind busy and gives it a sense of existing at all.

Perhaps you can see the incentive to *keep* bad feelings, even while appearing and claiming to want them gone.

Perhaps you can see how focus on how the body feels, keeps thought's attention on you, the individual person stuck with bad luck and bad sensations.

Perhaps you can see how focus on emotions might keep a person from noticing the self's lack of reality.

The sense of who and what you are as a person is strengthened and reified by focus on what you feel, and whether you do or don't like it.

Feelings are the go-to resort of a mind threatened by its own nothingness.

Which ironically is the opposite of what so many enlightenment chasers are hoping to attain by seeking in the first place.

After all, a major reason people want enlightenment is for the promised liked feelings of continual bliss and equanimity.

Yet the very act of trying to get better feelings manages to solidify the sense of self, by occupying the mind so thoroughly.

So is it possible that, if it somehow became no longer necessary to only experience what you like,

there might be no need to continue seeking?

Could it be that, without a demand for only liked experiences, what would be left is, “Ok, this is it, as it is, may as well experience it?”

Could likes and dislikes turn into acceptance and interesting and good enough as is?

Perhaps this may be more enlightened than the version of awakening you’ve been seeking, with its exclusion of anything other than bliss and happiness.

Feelings come.

You like them. You don’t like them.

So what.

Maybe it doesn’t matter what you feel.

This is it.

Liked or not.

And wouldn’t it be something,

or even nothing,

if it turned out that

you like that.

THE SHIFT?

July 18, 2023

"You call it consciousness. This is your waking state — your consciousness shifts from sensation to sensation, from perception to perception, from idea to idea, in endless succession."

~Nisargadatta

"The ocean is the ocean. All the waves, large and small, all the ripples and the raging seas are an apparent shifting of the substance H2O. The movement is a quality of H2O. There is no separate shift. The entire ocean is shifting constantly."

~Gilbert Schultz

"The rope never was a snake. In the realization, nothing changed."

~David Boulter

There's always lots of talk in spiritual forums about The Shift.

Because a lot of people, including perhaps you, want it. *Reeeall*y want it.

Whatever it is.

Of course people do talk as if they know what it is. And of course it's an appealing idea, this notion that we can leave the pain of being a person behind and transcend into something much grander and more peaceful.

So let's look for a minute without all the propaganda.

For a shift to happen, that means something moves. Something goes from this to that, from here to there. Something changes.

When it comes the great spiritual shift, what is that something? What exactly is it that shifts, travels from this place to that place, and actually changes?

Is it the brain? Before or after The Great Shift it's the same brain, same head, same chemicals and electrical impulses. Maybe it fires off at different times to different stimuli in various locations, but the brain itself remains the same.

The brain does not shift.

So that's not it.

Maybe it's the mind? The mind is a concept, not a real thing, and it changes all the time. Is that a shift or just another mind change?

Is it thought that shifts? Thoughts redirect millisecond by millisecond throughout lifetimes, and whatever they are, they're the same substance regardless of whether they're about a flower or a knife or love or enlightenment. So if changed thoughts is what we're calling The Shift, then hey no big deal, not worth the hype and the lifetime of seeking.

Perhaps what shifts is feelings or mood, such as, sadness or anxiety changes into bliss. No feeling stays forever though, including bliss. Besides, if that's it, then surely there is medication that can help make that happen quicker than trying to get the spiritual shift to occur.

Maybe the one thing we can shift is attention.

Well, we certainly try.
Shift your attention to the breath, to the feeling, to the present moment, to I AM, to that stressful thought, to images, to excising past trauma by remembering and analyzing it, to chopping wood and carrying water.

Never mind that we are not the actual boss of attention- it does what it wants. I mean, when we drive and zone out, a) did we control that? b) what drove? and c) is that a shift?

Whose attention actually shifted? It doesn't appear to be ours.

So that attention alteration- how important is it? And also us, the driver- how important are we?

But, but, but, Mind-Tickler- What about consciousness? Isn't there a shift in consciousness?

OK. Well. Are we saying consciousness changes, moves from here to there?

Um… how does that work?

Our own consciousness (aka personal attention) might move. But that is very self-centric isn't it?

Conveniently reinforcing, not dismantling, the sense of self that consciousness and awareness then revolve and move around.

Sure sure. That's it.

Besides, if consciousness is out there, does it need us to know that? Does anything actually change- in us or anywhere else- if we personally know it's there?

Or does it just *feel like* a change, *seem* to be a change?

Consciousness is whatever it is whether we put our focus and attention on it or not, and even whether we're alive or dead.

Consciousness does not shift.

Whew. Fine. Let's change gears for a moment. Let's pretend that we did just determine what shifts.

Let's now look at the actual movement, the actual change.

FROM what *TO* what? Where was whatever-it-is before the shift, and where does it move *TO*, afterwards?

From one idea, one paradigm, one understanding, one feeling, one perception to another?

Are any of those self-based activities, actual shifts?

We say, "I'm not there yet."

Meaning whatever it is, it's there, not here.

Apparently we're supposed to literally move to 'there.'

While staying in the present moment of course.

The thing is though, if it's not here already, then how can we even know about any of this?

"I'm here. But I want to be there."

What a fun game.

Nothing wrong with this game. We can play or not play- either is a fine way to spend a life.

It might just be easier- on us- to know it's a game.

It might just be easier- on us- to consider that perhaps nothing real, nothing essential, shifts.

Or needs to shift.

So that, if we do enjoy chasing that ball,

We can chase it for the fun of

Being here.

Not there.

NO-SELF, AGAIN

July 25, 2023

"I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

~T.S. Elliot

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

"There is no oasis situated yonder; you are stuck with the mirage."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

Le sigh.

So this week's Mind-Tickler started out like so many previous ones, using everyday language and everyday examples to reveal, for the millionth time, that you don't exist.

Yep, that again.

This one started out using examples of what we call "introverted and extroverted," in yet another weekly attempt to help you see that everything is all really about the protection of the sense of self.

The self that doesn't exist. The self that can't be found.

And then I got tired, and cut out all the blahdeeblah and cut right to the chase. Again.

Because as I've said so often before, in so many ways, with so many everyday life examples, there is no you, there is no self, there is no mind, there is no ego, there is no personality, there is no insert-your-name-here.

I know, I'm sorry, I really am. But there is none.

Ok but why, friendly Mind-Tickler, does everything keep coming back to this, over and over and over?

Because it's the prime directive. Because it drives every experience you have. Because every situation in every life boils down to, *You are not what you think you are*.

And yes, I know, you're "right here," pointing vaguely in the direction of a clavicle. And yes, I know there's a strong sense of you.

Got it. So what?

As if that "sense," which comes with the obligatory announcement, *But I feel it!* proves anything.

Because what the hell is "a sense" anyway?

More nothing, that's what.

And the thing is, when you focus on what you sense or think or see- when you focus on what you experience- as the way of proving that you are indeed *right here*, your ability to be clear is instantly skewed and off.

Because focusing on what you sense inserts you, solidifies you, reifies you, as *The One Things Happen To*.

That "Sense" creates you as a person.

Not the other way around.

So maybe you can imagine what pretending you're something when actually you're nothing, might feel like.

What does it feel like being a unicorn and living a whole life terrified to find out you're made up?

Imagine being in constant fear of having this charade be seen and exposed.

In everyday life, this might look like caring what others think about you, working to make the boss or social media think you're great, trying to look nonchalant and say the right thing in social situations, or staying in and not going out at all.

All in an attempt to control what others see and think. About you.

Because the image, the facade, the presentation, must be controlled. Others must not see the wispy nothing you know you are.

As if those scary, dangerous and able-to-see-you others are any more real than you.

Welcome to human, unicorn.

The self has only one job. *Pretend this is real. Don't let on.*

The constant fear of exposure drives everything.

Turns out, that background hum of, *Something isn't right,* which so many folks experience, is correct.

Luckily, as usual, none of this matters. Everyday life goes on.

So forget that “strong sense” of being you for just a minute. It may be there but it simply doesn’t matter.

Instead, try on BEING the things that are happening, as opposed to *The One W*ho feels them or *The One Who* is aware of them.

You don't have to believe this to try it on.

Try on being, as in literally it's what you are- every word, every thought, every feeling, every memory, every story, every color, every sound.

Being all that. Non-stop fluid, changeable, infinitely varied. Unable to be held and kept.

Being the happenings.

Not the happening-to.

Not the watching or watchER, either.

What then? What would that be…

Hey, where’d you go?

"'How do we know we're not people in a movie?' she asked.
I looked at her not knowing how to reply.
'Mama, how do we know that things are real?'
Great. Now we have a junior existentialist in the house.
'Well, we don't know. We just have to hope that what we think is real is real.'

'But how do we know?' she asked, insistently.
Ah, a scientist, who wants empirical evidence.
'We don't know. We just have to hope.'

'Mama, how do we know things aren't a dream? You know, how

sometimes life feels like a dream? Do you ever feel that way?'
'Yes, sweetie, I feel that way all the time.'"

~Julie Metz

"What you are basically, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. And you're ALL that, only you're pretending you're not."

~Alan Watts

ATTAINMENT EFFORTS

August 1, 2023

"There’s no such thing as an enlightened person because there’s no such thing as a person. The character is a fiction. There never WAS a you, will never BE a you, and, despite appearances, there’s no you NOW. I know you feel strongly otherwise-- it's a hard feeling to shake -- but when we open our eyes and see what is, we find ourselves glaringly absent."

~Jed McKenna

"Do not mistake bliss for awareness- it comes and goes; it's not always there."

~Rupert Spira

"Reality and completeness are in plain sight. Absolute completeness surrounds you wherever you go. We humans have long ago deceived ourselves into such a confined tangle of confusion and disarray that we scarcely even consider, much less experience for ourselves, the divinity within and all around us."

~Adyashanti

Attaining enlightenment. Making bliss show up and then exploring what actions will make it stay, forever.

Being so good at your practice, whatever it is, that you force existence to funnel into, "Bingo! I did it!"

By the power of your shifted focus, your desire, your "I did this and then that." By the power of your right teacher and good choices and going inward instead of out.

"Whatever you did, it worked."

Apparently what moves that ball closer and closer to the goal, is you.

And of course who wouldn't like the idea of *getting close*, as if there is a literal path with an end-point up the road?

Although, is, "getting close," actually close?

Meanwhile, the same you who says, *I am not the doer* thinks you're the one who does enlightenment. As long as you do things right. There may not be free will and control but still, you expect to have the power to awaken.

As if awakening is holding back until it sees whether things are being honed properly.

Although that does leave unexplained how so many people do absolutely nothing for their *pop* and it comes anyway. And how so many people do everything right, and... nada.

Sit on the meditation pillow, do all the satsangs and silent retreats and internal inquiries and GET IT, while the guy on the cushion right next to you does the same program with the same sincerity, and doesn't.

If those "tools" are what produced the desired result, then shouldn't they work every time?

If there's doubt about this, if you're convinced it's you who sets the stage to allow awakening to show up, then great, go for it, and put all that cause-

effect effort to the test.

Right now. Make it happen.

What are you waiting for?

What you're waiting for is for existence to grant the grace that makes your efforts pay off.

All you can do is pretend you have tools for control, and hope lightning will strike.

Which means it's up to the lightning, not anyone's efforts.

As you've probably read and heard many times, *If you're doing it, that's not it*.

It's not the self that gets enlightened.

So, sure, you strive to be the one who arrives at the mountaintop. But you can never be that one.

The person cannot awaken.

Assuming awakening is even possible.

I mean, is it possible for the self to eliminate itself, while also depending on itself to create a "shift?"

Consciousness is not some personal ladder-climbing achievement for an individual Me.

The individual is part of and included in consciousness.

Already.

Awake or not.

And one person's "heightened awareness" is just one more thing consciousness gets to experience.

Within consciousness.

No better, no more special, no more evolved, and not even higher, than no awareness at all.

Of course there's no reason to stop doing all the various actions in hopes of bringing a result, if you want to.

Meditate, inquire, sit silently- why not?

You can even continue trying to have it both ways.

Saying, *I'm not the doer* while thinking it's up to you to make awakening happen. Saying, *This happening is the result of all my efforts beforehand*, while also saying, *There is no I*. Saying, *This is it* while yearning for a different *It*.

None of that is wrong. Sometimes it even feels good, comforting, reassuring. Sometimes there's a lightening of self, a sense of spaciousness or peace or non-existence.

It's just that the self will attribute any attainment to its own actions.

Reinforcing itself.

Because that which is concerned with attainment and What-You-Are and whether you exist and whether you get enlightened in the first place,

is you.

Of course the self will come up with answers that confirm, as opposed to eliminate, itself.

So hopefully those answers are satisfying.

Still it remains though,

that no individual can control

what will not be controlled.

SCRIPTS

August 8, 2023

"Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else."

~Margaret Mead

"There are no new thoughts, they're all recycled."

~Byron Katie

When you hear from as many folks as I have over the years, listening to people recite their feelings, issues, problems and wishes, you begin to notice something.

You begin to see that while of course, everyone's day to day circumstances are totally unique and one of a kind, the way everyone experiences and talks about problems is shockingly all the same.

You begin to see the mind-patterns that come with being a person.

All people talk about problems using the exact same words. Sometimes word for word.

Like a song with memorized lyrics.

Around the world, regardless of age and situation, thought has a literal script, which it recites throughout lifetimes, and generations.

Lives are being lived on script.

While no one person says all of the available script, everyone, without exception, says some of it.

Like a menu- pick your special:

This is the problem:
Something's not right. Something's not OK.

This is how it feels:
A contraction, a tension, a heaviness, an emptiness, a sense.

This is what's needed:
Peace, others' love, safety, motivation, energy, control, sleep, money, success, health, loved ones to stay forever, equanimity, change, others' right behavior, better feelings.

This is what it means:
Bad person, loser, unlovable, lazy, weak, broken, not social enough, not confidant enough, not kind enough, not enlightened enough, just plain not enough, wasted life.

This is the cause (the why):
Trauma, the past, wasted potential, wrong choices, wrong actions, others.

The script is common, predictable, unoriginal, repetitive, and the same everywhere.

Additionally on this menu is the obligatory idea that these thoughts are "yours."

Supposedly they happen specifically to you, in your own head.

Conveniently creating that unique, difficult, and singular- you.

Proving your separateness, proving your distinction from everything and everyone else.

The thought script enables the sense of "Me."

When actually, it's community property.

The mind is a collective.

Everyone dips from the same pool.

Which means not one of those thoughts belongs to you.

Not one is actually about you at all.

Mind is just singing its song. Reciting its words.

Thought constructs a "reality" using this small, unoriginal handful of words.

All while insisting how unique we are.

Now, you could be thrilled to learn that you're not alone, not special, and that these thoughts aren't yours or particular to you.

But more likely, you are disbelieving, feeling misunderstood, perhaps annoyed, and mentally arguing for your special personal pain and messed-upness.

"No way!" you may be saying. "My situation is different, My situation is worse. Other people don't suffer like this. Other people aren't this messed up. It's me. I'm different."

Surprise! All that special-you stuff is part of the script too.

Luckily though, whether you believe it or not, this community pool is actually good news.

Because if thoughts are not yours and not about you,

even though they appear to be, even if they insist so,

Then what you are becomes unclear.

Harder to pin down. Perhaps even harder to hurt.

Since the person hurting becomes harder to find.

Which unpredictably

may provide relief and

a not-taking-things-seriously lightness

which just might turn out to be

a special

not on the usual menu.

THE WITNESS

August 15, 2023

"The Observer Is the Observed."

~J. Krishnamurti

"Awareness is a capacity of the human mind."

~Diana Winston

"The brain is trying to use what it has labeled awareness to explore awareness. There is no such thing as awareness."

~Michael Markham

"The point of view from which you are consciously reading these words may not be the ONLY conscious point of view to be found in your brain. It is one thing to say you are unaware of a vast amount of activity in your brain. It is quite another to say that some of this activity is aware of itself and is watching your every move."

~Sam Harris

This is how I see it. Is it Truth? Who knows. I just have a point of view like you do, (albeit in this case, most likely controversial and not the same as yours.)

Lots of teachers talk about "being The Witness." Being aware of your self, your thoughts, your feelings. Watching as if you're not you, as if you're something other than you.

And then, being aware of this awareness.

Most mediations and spiritual inquiries are built on this. Some folks, many folks, even define enlightenment as becoming aware of this Witness, this Awareness.

Which of course is fine. I get it. It's great to watch thoughts and feelings and see that they aren't you. That distance from the person feels way better than the belief that the person is what you are.

Since being a person comes with lots and lots of doesn't-feel-great.

So noticing awareness can be a very worthy exercise.

Like hamstring curls, or crunches.

From where I sit though, it's a trap. A whole lot of people get stuck there, in confusion and misunderstanding.

The idea that awareness is something that needs to be "connected to," something you need to *do*, generates a sense of levels- a sense of not-there-and-needing-to-get-there. Of course there's always another level to attain and witness.

Being aware of awareness subtly perpetuates a sense of solidity, control, and doingness, enabling and confirming the sense of self, as opposed to seeing through it.

Nothing wrong with this and again, it can, and often does, feel better. It just may perhaps be the opposite of what is being sought by all that noticing in the first place.

Meanwhile, when Rupert Spira says, *"Few people are aware that they are aware. Most people's lives consist of a flow of thoughts, images, ideas, feelings, sensations, sights, sounds, and so on. Very few people ask, 'What is it that knows this flow of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions? With what am I aware of my experience?"…*

I notice he doesn't ask, *"With what am I aware of awareness?"*

Because after all, what *is* it that does that? Is it some outside, all-powerful, intangible?

Science has shown that awareness is a neural processing option, and brain-dependent.

Which means that to be aware, we use the same brain and mind as the everyday brain and mind.

Maybe it involves a different part or location in the brain.

But still, brain.

And really, what else can it be? It's not possible for alive humans to step outside of that. Everything perceived is filtered through that brain-sieve.

So "shifting attention," is still you, trying to be connected to you, by processing differently for a while.

That what is called, "The Witness."

The brain, shifting focus.

This means- witness, watch, observe, notice- it's still you doing that.

Pretending to be a witness to a non-existent self's doings.

Pretending, as so many supposedly enlightened folk do, that it's possible to be what is *watched* and also, somehow, what is *watching*.

But consciousness is not a watcher.

Consciousness is an experiencer. Or more accurately, experience.

Which means, so are you.

Because what is *not* consciousness?

So you are experience.

Every thought, every feeling, every sound, every sight, every sensation.

All you.

Shifting constantly, moving, in milliseconds, to *BE* this sound and that color and that thought.

BEING that.

As opposed to some witness of all that rich experience.

As opposed to a solid, observable-by-what, unchanging, small object with properties of its own.

Being no thing. Being every thing. Being all things.

Inexplicably vast, infinitely changeable, fluid, spacious.

You.

Being.

This is the end of you as you know it.

Witness *that*.

For a change.

HOPE

September 5, 2023

"Hope is a high and you can't get off."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"Since the ego has no hope of surviving in paradise. it'll always want to be on the 'road to paradise'."

~Chuck Hillig

"When someone is without hope because they can see that there is no cause for hope, there's hope."

~Jed McKenna

"The point of view from which you are consciously reading these words may not be the ONLY conscious point of view to be found in your brain. It is one thing to say you are unaware of a vast amount of activity in your brain. It is quite another to say that some of this activity is aware of itself and is watching your every move."

~Sam Harris

The woman on social media posts, "I need to have hope. Hope is the only thing that keeps me going." Everyone cheers her on. Go girl. You can do this.

Well, except weirdo me. I'm thinking, "Oh honey, no."

I mean, of course I get that humans love a good hope. Who doesn't love those wishes and yearnings for happiness, better feelings, better circumstances? Who isn't counting on them to turn into actualities, simply by the power of our wanting?

Surely we can *think* life into giving us what we want.

Although it's not like, even if we have enough hope, life will actually come through with what is hoped for.

There is no actual connection between hoping and getting.

Meanwhile, usually it's unnoticed how that kind of wishful yearning makes things in the here and now.

Because hope is all about later- a better-than-this tomorrow, a better-than-this life. Next time! Looking forward.

Making what's actually here now feel lacking, inadequate, not enough.

Yes it might feel very true that what's present in this current life is miserable, suffering, not ok.

Of course we'd want to wish all that away with hope.

It just that when our focus is on a better *later,* it becomes difficult to notice or value anything good in the actual present.

When the experience is, “This sucks, I need something better,” we’re not going to notice what’s good right now.

Hope is the opposite of enough. Hope is the opposite of good. Hope is the opposite of *This Is It*.

I mean, yeah this may be It, but give us a better It, wouldja? This It is unacceptable.

Hope is seeking.

Not to mention that hope is 100% a fantasy.

There’s nothing real about it.

We imagine- as in, create a mental image of- a better life, a better situation, a better feeling.

A fictionalized, idealized, aspiration of what we think will be better than this.

A dream. Made up by thought.

Not real.

It’s nothing.

So when we hope, we’re pining for a dream. We're chasing some fictional ideal, a fantasy improvement out there later.

Which of course is not the end of the world. I mean, sure, hope away. Nothing wrong with that.

It’s just that if the current experience includes depression or anxiety or addiction, hope subtly, quietly, actually, makes things worse.

So just for novelty and because why not, it might be fun to put attention on something else for a change.

It might be fun to notice the present, notice what's literally good enough right now, notice what doesn't need improvement right now.

A body, able to feel. A mind, able to think. Gravity, air, breath, love, humor, quiet, internet, sight, sound.

Feelings of all kinds, liked and disliked.

A modern-day mediation.

Lived.

Thought will say that's not enough.

But if what's actually here isn't enough, if the good that's actually in our lives doesn't count, how will we notice "better" when it comes along?

This is not a suggestion to be fakely positive. It's just that, if better is truly what we want, we might notice what we've got first.

Because life never promised that anyone will ever get anything more than *This*.

So it might be kinder, more peaceful, more reasonable, to accept and expect an imperfect present,

with whatever goodness is already in it.

And see if it's enough.

Anything else is

Hopeless.

THOUGHT AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

September 19, 2023

"I am shocked at what my brain will dredge up in its desperate bid to reclaim my attention. Old 70s TV shows, mortifying moments from grade school. It was really going through some dusty old mental files, just jumping up and down to reclaim focus. My brain is basically a toddler in the grocery store. Mom, mom, mommy, mom, mom, mom, mom, mom, mother, mooooooom."

~Comment on Facebook

Last week on Facebook, I jumped on a viral trend and asked, “Male friends specifically- how often do you think about the Roman Empire?”

Seeing that post, you may have thought, “Et tu, Judy?”

After all, here at the Mind-Tickler Forum, the usual conversation is about self, mind, consciousness, reality, free will, feelings. Why waste this week’s Tickler on the Roman Empire, of all things?

Besides, why is it even a trend to ask men if they think about the Roman Empire in the first place?

Well, rarely do we ask people to expose what they think about on a regular basis.

So when we do ask, apparently it's fascinating to discover that others have different thoughts than we do.

Not to mention, how else could it have been discovered that gladiators, aquaducts, emperors, the width of train tracks, and the state of empires fill

the minds of many thousands of folks, daily, weekly, monthly.**

Wait. *Fills the minds*, you say?

Well yes. Because whether it's Romans or Greeks or Vikings or World War II or Mayans…

or whether it's enlightenment, reality, awareness, consciousness…

or whether it's when the next drink is coming or if we should have made that golf shot or what's happening on our phone…

even if it's just an annoying song stuck in our head…

thinking is happening.

Even meditators who think they slow or stop thoughts, still have to think in order to know what those thoughts are doing.

Fast or slow, the mind must be filled.

The subject matter it is filled with?

Irrelevant.

Any topic will do.

Ruminating about the Roman Empire works equally as well as having a song stuck in the head.

Mind, happily filled with busy-work.

And then as an extra bonus, all that thinking creates identity.

We know who and what we are, based on the particular stories focused on.

"I'm the one who thinks about important subjects such as Roman history, or awareness, or free will."

Thinking convinces us that we're a person.

"Here I am, thinking about modern politics compared to the fall of the Roman Empire."

"Here I am, stopping my thoughts, attaining equanimity, connecting with higher consciousness."

"Here I am, feeling, and then thinking about that feeling."

"Here I am, reviewing how I handled that game, that meeting, that social occasion, that relationship."

Here I am. Right here.

A person. Of "substance."

Rumination on any topic provides that supposed substance.

Self. Identified by thoughts.

Never mind that thoughts contain no substance themselves.

They're nothing.

So when the self depends on that nothing in order to prove its existence, well, that's an odd kind of real.

Meanwhile, in all the focus on thinking's subject matter, what usually goes unnoticed is the repetition.

It's always the same subjects and the same thoughts showing up for each individual.

"I'm alone." "I'm not good enough." "I need to understand no-self." "The Roman Empire was important."

Over and over and over and over.

Because thinking is not original, not creative.

At all.

It learns something and then hangs on to bits of that learning, for a lifetime.

Repeating, repeating, repeating, repeating.

Practicing. Making sure its favorite stories show up frequently enough to become, and then remain, rote, natural, effortless.

Exactly the same way a child learns language.

Blah blah Roman Empire blah blah ME blah Unmotivated blah Full Potential blah Unlovable blah Something Wrong blah Enlightened blah Was Marcus Aurelius a good Emperor.

Mind, practicing repetitious strings of words.

Regurgitating, like Romans in the vomitorium, the same stuff all day every day.

In order to convince us we are real and separate.

After all, thought says so.

Even though it is nothing, talking about nothing, describing nothing, using words which are nothing.

And therefore, proving nothing.

Still, all roads lead to Rome.

Thought has to think.

One thought is as good as the next.

It doesn't matter what they're about.

It doesn’t even matter if there’s a person thinking them.

Thumbs up or thumbs down,

It’s all the same

substance.

** (if you're in the mood for a laugh, watch till the end.)

https://www.tiktok.com/@ambarrail/video/7278682791531908398?_r=1&_t=8fnSA5pEbao

BE SERIOUS!

September 26, 2023

"People suffer only because they take seriously what the gods made for fun."

~Alan Watts

Recently a Wiser-than-Thou on social media told me that I am too far light-hearted about enlightenment.

I lack depth, effort, commitment, gravitas. I'm not goal-oriented enough, not suffering enough, not serious enough, and not working hard enough to fix all that.

"With you, it is only 'laugh until you die,'" they said.

Well gosh, yes, that does sound terrible.

More effort, less laughter. Got it.

For many fundamentalists, there's no wisdom or value in humor.

There's no room for lightness in enlightenment.

But, see… the word itself contains… Ok never mind.

"The enlightened fool sees the ego trips of society and still finds joy and laughter in its midst. The fool is often the one with crazy wisdom. With laughter and jokes as their weapon, the fool possesses a wisdom that is out of reach of the conformist." --George Carlin

In this same online conversation (aka lecture), I was given the (unrequested)advice to start looking for, “I am.”

While being informed that, “I am” is always here.

Soooooo, why would I look for it? It’s here already.

Maybe I have to look for it in order for I am to be here?

Ok, I'll start looking for both seriousness and I am, soon as I'm done looking for the sense in these comments.

I mean, have these important people never heard of the cosmic joke?

Y’know, joke. As in, funny.

“Life as it is should be enough of a reason to laugh. It is so absurd, it is so ridiculous. It is so beautiful. It is a cosmic joke.” --Osho

The cosmic joke is: we are what we are seeking.

Already. Seek it or not.

So I mean sure, I can keep looking for what I’ve already got.

But… Well OK yeah, that is pretty funny.

“I laugh when I think how I once sought paradise as a realm outside of the world of birth. It is the laughter of one who, after having painfully searched for something for a long time, finds it one morning in the pocket of his coat." --Thich Nhat Hanh

All these wise-guys taking their selves and their approaches and methods ever so earnestly, determinedly, unsmilingly.

And apparently they’re taking mine and everyone else's the same way too. Because their own heaviness is not enough- they want us to catch it also.

And yet, what exactly is it that needs to be “taken” seriously?

It's not the self- we don't even know what that is. Fiction doesn't care how it's "taken."

Is it I am? Does I am insist on weighty solemnity?

What for?

But if so it needs to lighten up. Because let's face it, these selves are ridiculous.

"Enlightenment is so light– just like laughter. The theologians have made it so heavy, so burdensome, that people ignore it." --Osho

Besides, what isn't funny about this spiritual stuff?

Nothing, that's what.

"Lila, (Sanskrit: "play") in Hinduism: the effortless or playful relation between the Absolute, or brahman, and the contingent world." --wikipedia

Meanwhile, all those online lecturing non-dual finger-waggers- I really do feel for them.

Really, I do.

Not enough to engage them in conversation, of course.

But still, it seems like a hard way to spend this one precious life (apologies, Mary Oliver)- to be constantly seeking what's already here, trying to become what one already is.

All that striving. For something they've already got.

And meanwhile, so many so-called awake people just spontaneously combust anyway, unasked-for, without a lick of effort. How does that fit into the fundamentalist model?

Now to be clear, I am not saying only laugh it up and ignore any pain or seriousness.

But to avoid lightness because it messes up some made-up rule of attainment is absurd, and not in a funny way.

Because humor disarms the mind and eases its resistance in ways the direct assault of effort and method often cannot do.

So for many folks, it could be that the serious, goal-oriented substance of what this self achieves and personally makes happen, is actually in the way.

Maybe we need more not-important, more trivial, more merry whimsical shallowness. More laughing not less.

“I Am a Professional Laugher.” --Dalai Lama

Because existence is happening, and it appears to adore our silly funny selves.

And what part of I am doesn’t want to celebrate that, often, and with gusto?

And also because really,

if enlightenment is not lighter,

why would anyone even want it

at all?

Seriously.

"When you realize how perfect everything is, you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky."

~Siddharta Guatama

TRAUMA

October 5, 2023

"We tend to regard ourselves as puppets of the Past, driven along by something that is always behind us."

~Alan Watts

"Trauma is nothing more than being stuck in what you believe."

~Byron Katie

"Therapists have told patients that, 'The body remembers what the mind forgets,' and that memories and traumas are recorded in cellular DNA. Absolutely no scientific evidence supports these notions."

~Aaron T. Beck, MD

Lately I've seen several friends post about their trauma, their inner work, their feelings about frequent triggers from the past. All of them say some version of, "This pain will be with me forever. My inner work will continue for the rest of my life."

Which makes me sad.

Because decades later, these folks are still feeling pain over situations and events which are long gone.

The trauma is over.

But apparently it's never ending, and there's always some trigger, some reminder to hurt all over again.

Y'know, in case they forgot.

So from here, their pain starts to seem like an old friend, a pet, a reliable go-to when things get too quiet. It starts to seem like a thought-path for explanations, excuses, and problem-solving,

when things have the nerve to go too well in life.

(Yes, I said that. See? Angry.)

Replaying, revisiting, remembering. Sitting with feelings. Over and over and over.

The thing is, if one is forever triggered, forever feeling old pain, forever trying to figure out what happened so it doesn't happen again,

then all that trauma work isn't working, is it?

Because there's no endgame. There's no way out. It's a forever project, and there's always more work to do.

Meanwhile, if it's necessary to have a peaceful past in order to have a peaceful present, do you know who's screwed?

Everyone.

Because everyone has some trauma, everyone has a less-than-desirable past experience. No one has a life of no-pain, no intensity, no I-hate-this-this-is-awful-make-it-stop.

Yet everyone thinks their suffering is special, and worse than others'.

The old pain becomes an identity. The self becomes identified by old hurt.

That's how you know who, and what, and that, you are.

While meanwhile, really being just exactly like everyone else.

Reliving, replaying, re-feeling.

Rehearsing.

Memorizing.

The opposite of setting free. More like setting in stone.

All while supposedly trying to be free of it.

The actuality is, you don't want your trauma gone. That's why you do those methods, and revere those "healers," who don't actually help the pain leave.

Because the identity of hurting-you, a you formed and based on pain, is precious.

It feels like crap but at least you know what you're dealing with.

Whereas whatever peace or freedom might replace that pain and that story, is unknown, unfamiliar, uncertain.

And leaves you with nothing.

That's scarier than the old trauma.

So a whole current life gets ignored in favor of a mental movie.

Because that's all "the past" is.

It's not reality.

Maybe it was, once. But now it's just a movie.

Still, it feels so real, because it's bolstered by popular ideas such as, "It's stored in there- in the unconscious, or in the body, or in the DNA."

As if those storage ideas are anything at all more than reasons to continue holding onto and never releasing,

pain you don't even want.

So if change is truly desired, wouldn't it be interesting, or at least different, (and different is what's needed at this point if you truly don't want to hurt forever,) to notice actual present life instead of the movie.

Noticing all the literal, actual, non-threat that is happening right now. The literal actual present. The literal actual safety. The literal actual okness happening this very second.

Yes, the mind dismisses all that, finding it uninteresting and "unhelpful."

And yes, everyone else supports that same useless reinforcing of story.

Because let's face it, they have the same mind you do. So of course everyone agrees that, once burned, you must remain screaming in pain forever.

But if that's true, then why even bother with trauma work? If it's stuck in there, then it's not coming out. No point in the busywork of trying to make it leave.

Still, it's fine to keep at your forever project anyway.

But if freedom and peace is truly what you want, it might make sense instead,

to notice the abundant freedom and peace

you already have.

It might make sense instead,

to notice where that's stored.

And then it might make sense instead,

to see what's left

of trauma,

and of you.

"The past is made of memory, the future of imagination. Neither have any existence outside the thought that thinks them."

~Rupert Spira

"With no problem to solve, what will you do? Immediately you start living. You will eat, you will sleep, you will love, you will work, you will have a chit-chat, you will sing, you will dance – what else is there to do?"

~Osho

"The past is the past,
and the present is what your life is....
So come to the pond...
and put your lips to the world.
And live
your life."

~Mary Oliver

THE REAL YOU

October 31, 2023

"I am large. I contain multitudes."

~Walt Whitman

"Do you know that the word 'person' means 'mask'? The 'persona' is the mask worn by actors in Greco-Roman drama.... So How to be a real person equals How to be a genuine fake."

~Alan Watts

"We cannot discover, uncover or recover our true self because it's not covered, it's nonexistent."

~Jed McKenna

This week someone told me about a spiritual teacher who is claiming that the current "them" on recent video display is the "real" them. As in, that prancing goof playing on newer videos is this person's finally discovered, finally unleashed, "true self."

I guess the previously non-prancing, serious person with the same name was a fake self. Happily, this teacher corrected this error and now feels free to connect with and show off to the world, their real-them inner clown.

I admit this left me with questions.

Such as... where did this teacher's previous self go, once it was dethroned- Bermuda? Where do once-real-but-now-aren't selves go to die?

And, is their old self gone forever?

And, is this new, gamboling character the entirety of what this person is? I mean, now that the rightful them has emerged, if a family member dies or some other misfortune occurs, will this person still blithely romp around?

After all, *True i*s true at all times. *True* is not variable.

And, how do they know this latest character is the legitimate one, and that this latest true self won't be replaced by yet another, different, true self at a future time?

And, maybe most curiously, when did a bunch of *behaviors*- for example, temporarily sashaying around in front of a camera- become a *self?*

As I said, questions.

Now before you flood me with emails, let me say that of course I know what this teacher means.

It's just that it's… silly.

Because really, notice how anyone, including you, "knows" that one behavior is authentic and another one is fake.

That knowing is based on thought. Simply a thought. Just another thought.

A thought which brings along with it a feeling, whether liked or disliked. That feeling is said to confirm, to prove, the thought.

Thought says, “This right here is the real you! And this feeling proves it!” And everyone says, “Yes!”

This is the entire basis for notions of “authenticity” and “who you are as a person.”

On such untrustworthy sources, you "know" who and what you are.

Until tomorrow, when, in a new context, an entirely different *Real You* shows up.

Because of course, these self-things fluctuate, varying wildly based on context, situation, preference, conditioning.

Yet here is everyone trying to figure out which of those variances is the rightful one.

Meanwhile, one might wonder what even cares so dang much about this. What so wants to determine which of the many presentations of Self pulled out of the bag, is the genuine one?

As if it matters in the slightest.

Since nothing real has any need to define itself.

Only something pretending, or with something to hide, needs to constantly, continuously, make a presentation, a show, of pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

And then calling it the One True Rabbit.

Ta-daaaa!

So perhaps this confusion comes from the idea that there is a true self at all.

Because really look, and all you can find are temporary, changeable roles.

Play-acts, images, presentations.

“Acting like” oneself. Not *being* one’s actual self. *Acting like* it.

Which is pretend. The opposite of true.

No point in being authentic about a fake self.

And since all the facets of the Me are pretend, neither *being yourself* or *not being yourself* is ever actually an option.

Since no role is a real person, and no role is the real you.

All portrayals, in any variation, can only be pretend.

So you're already as genuinely, legitimately, authentic as any rabbit in any hat can ever hope to be.

Leaving you with all the fun of being

all the rabbits

in all the hats.

For real.

THOUGHT BIAS

November 7, 2023

"The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones."

~Rick Hanson

A million years ago, I won first place in my division at the biggest dance competition in my world.

Are you imagining that I was confidant and feeling good about myself? LOL. Please.

No, I was riddled with panic and despair. Because the delightful "inner voice" convinced me that those judges made a mistake, that I didn't deserve to win, that anywhere I might go dancing afterwards, I'd have to live up to that error, and that I flat-out couldn't do it.

It didn't matter what others thought; their reassurances rolled right off. Nothing dissuaded me from knowing the win was undeserved.

Under this relentless pressure, I quit dancing for what turned into 18 years.

Not because I lost. Because I won.

Thought made sure the win was seen as a loss.

The mind skews toward the negative.

That's its nature.

Because whatever thought is, in order to (seem to) exist at all, it must have something to think about.

So it requires problems. It requires, *Something's not right* projects, and, *WHY did this happen*? riddles, and, *How can I fix this?* solutions and, *How can I think my way to safety in an unknown future?* worries.

There's no mental job security in a no-problem present moment.

So given an opportunity, the mind will ignore every positive and quickly go instead to, "not good enough," and, "loser, failure, bad, undeserving, unlovable, deficient."

With this negative skew, thought defines us.

Turning every situation, every moment, every context, into a definition, an identity, of an entire not-enough person.

"You may have gotten away with a win but you're really a loser, a fake, not as good as others, and a terrible person."

Along with my favorite- *Who do you think you are?*

Always a fun question.

First, because the thing that's asking is a gatekeeper with its own agenda.

So it conveniently leaves out everything that doesn't serve its problem-generating purpose.

All that life evidence we trot out to prove our lack and flaws is ferociously slanted and completely biased by the gatekeeper.

And second, ever wonder *why* the mind cares so dang much about who or what we are? Why it constantly needs to declare, "I am lazy, selfish, guilty, fake, bad, stupid, weak" etc?

I am I am I am I am…

Whatever words follow, don't even matter.

For now just noticing what we depend on to tell us who we are.

Because there is no other source to know what we are, other than what thought says.

None.

That negative self-serving self-evaluation is the only way we have, to know ourselves.

In fact, the only way we know we exist at all, is that thought says so.

Which means we have zero idea who or what we are. Because we have zero access to anything other than the mind's bias.

So it's no surprise that we think there's something- many things- wrong with us,

and that we- *WE!*- have to solve them.

As if it's possible to ever have the mental clarity to solve anything.

As if it's possible to ever even know if perceived problems are indeed problems.

So that a should-be-celebrated win can get twisted into failure. And our possible advantages and lovely character traits manage to get dismissed and unloved, if not completely unseen.

And if right about now, thought is saying, "Well then, what's the point? Life is meaningless..."

Notice what it's really saying is, "You need me. Without me you're nothing."

Which may be true.

But what's so terrible about being nothing? It can't be worse than being a hopeless failed loser.

Besides, nothing is nothing. It can't be turned into something with name calling and I-am-ing.

Which means, whatever we are, since we don't know and never will,

we might as well play with noticing this one tiny moment,

without evaluation (thought,) correction (thought,) future (thought,) or improvement (thought).

And then we can see if we need

Any other dance but

That.

GOALS & PLANNING

November 21, 2023

"We are quick to denounce ego as untrue, but this marvelous palace would just be an empty box without it. Ego is the magic that brings the dreamstate to life."

~Jed McKenna

"TAll time-
the past, the present, the future-
is contained now."

~J. Krishnamurti

"Living is life's only purpose."

~Nisargadatta

There are certain questions people ask on a regular basis. Some of those are in the "doing/planning/motivation" category.

Confusion in this area runs high.

The questions go in two directions. The most common is, “Why can’t I get up off the couch and make myself get things done?” The Tickler has written about that a few times before.

Today’s focus is on the other line of question, the, “I know I’m supposed to stay present and be good with *What Is*, but does that mean I have to abandon my life, my family, my job? What about goals, planning and action?” version.

Of course, I get why there’s confusion. After all, teachers have long given the idea that you’re doing this spirituality thing wrong if you’re concerned with the future and getting things done.

"There is no use planning for a future,
Which when you get to it and it becomes the present, you won’t be there.
You will be living in some other future which hasn’t yet arrived.
And so in this way,
One is never able actually to inherit and enjoy
The fruits of one’s actions.
You can’t live at all,
Unless you can live fully
Now."
--Alan Watts

“Don't say: What's next?
Let it be a surprise.
A tree doesn't wonder or plan where it should grow the next leaf or when to put out the next fruit. No, its entire life is just an unfolding. You be the tree of life that is just unfolding.
--Mooji

“I don't have a goal. Why would I cheat myself? Why would I think so small?”
--Byron Katie

As in, “Yo! You there! If you're making plans, you’re focusing on the wrong thing.”

Every spiritual seeker learns, *As it is* is where it's at.

Every spiritual seeker learns you're supposed to stay present in the moment, not be concerned with a future which is non-existent, and to accept or even love *What Is* without expectation, desire, or any need for change.

To have goals is to have your head in the "not now."

So it seems fair to be confused. Because those very same teachers who preach, "Stay present and in the now," schedule their interviews and podcasts and guest speakers long in advance.

Aka, they plan.

I mean, even "Chop wood, carry water" involves action. Hopefully planning to chop wood later when it isn't raining doesn't knock anyone out of their attained enlightenment.

Are you stepping off the enlightenment path if you pack a suitcase for later, aim for a promotion, decide what you'll eat later in the week when at the supermarket, or put your kid's next-month teacher conference on the calendar?

Is making an appointment not presence?

Does *As It Is* not include planning and action?

Does it have to be one or the other?

And the thing is, even if you were finally able to stay totally in the Now, finally able to never plan, chopping wood only when the presence-spirit moved you, would that actually be better?

Or would that also be Wrong?

Because don't get out of bed and don't get things done and don't get motivated, and well, everyone knows that's not ok either.

So to recap-
Do and plan and have goals = wrong.
Don't Do and don't get things done = wrong.

Yay! Equal-opportunity wrongness.

What kind of spirituality is it if no matter which way you go, you're living wrong?

So could it be possible that there's not actually a right way- one right way- to live and be present and attain, spiritually?

After all, *Do*, or *Don't Do*- both are included in *As it is*.

Whatever you're moved or not moved to do, is presence.

Making plans for tomorrow, here in the present.
Having goals, here in the now.
Lying on the couch trying to force action, happening now.
Experiencing wishes and desires, now.

Holding lightly to both doing and the lack of doing.

Because after all, results and whatever happens later aren't up to you anyway, no matter how well you plan.

Perhaps all of the options are good. Since existence includes all of it.

Which means no matter what does or doesn't get done, you literally can't do this life thing, or this enlightenment thing, wrong.

Because you can't be not-present-in-the-now.

You are always present in the now.

"You are what you are doing RIGHT NOW!"
--U.G. Krishnamurti

Plan and take action. Don't plan and take action.

All of it.

Right here.

Right Now.

As it is.

There is nothing else

possible.

NOT ENOUGH MONEY

November 28, 2023

"How do you react when you believe the thought that if you had more money you'd be happier? You get to be unhappy now."

~Byron Katie

"Everything happens for a reason. except when it doesn't. But even then you can, in hindsight, fabricate a reason that will satisfy your belief system."

~Iain M. Banks

"Since the Universe has no center, you can't be it."

~Neil deGrasse Tyson

Today's Tickler is brought to you by those in the, "I don't have enough money" club.

Which includes you and pretty much everyone else. Very few people think they have enough money. Even the rich think they need more.

Meanwhile here I am retiring soon with not a lot of savings. Shouldn't I be churning with terror about the future, where' surely I'll be homeless on the streets with the ubiquitous shopping cart?

Maybe. But somehow I'm not.

Perhaps because my life has provided numerous opportunities to see, over and over, that whether money does or doesn't come has nothing to do with me.

I mean, I've done everything right and money simply did not arrive. I've done absolutely nothing and somehow it rained cash.

The ways of income start to seem pretty darned arbitrary.

Money does what it wants.

Income is not tied to humans' behaviors.

Just like enlightenment, just like happiness, just like sleep and health and ideas and life itself.

Okay, okay, I know you don't believe this. I know you believe, along with everyone else, that income depends on you, and your right or wrong actions, and your hard, smart, work.

Even though there's no promise, no guarantee, no straight or even crooked line going directly from effort to results. All you can do is put in energy and time and then hope it pays off.

Though if it's not a given that you work hard and money surely follows, then it's not provable that it was your efforts which brought the moola.

There might be some correlation, but not causation.

But never mind all that. You are the center point around which it all revolves. What you do. What you don't do. What you deserve.

Because money must be earned. You have to deserve it. Like getting a divine pat on the head from the heavens for good behavior.

Sadly, when the head pat doesn't come, “I don’t have enough money,” quickly turns into, “I’m not enough, as a person,”

No-money thoughts invariably lead to "I AM" thoughts. “I am a failure, I am a loser, I am lazy, stupid, weak.”

As in, money and thoughts about it tell you who you are.

So that now it’s not just income that’s not enough, it’s you, as a person, also.

Which is your fault too. You you you.

Conveniently supporting the self’s misguided importance as center of the universe.

As if money could never come unexpectedly, on its own, deserved or not. Like breath, doing its own thing, also deserved or not.

I mean, wouldn’t it be a whole other experience if it turned out that income is not actually tied to your good behavior, value, worth?

Of course, I am aware you don’t believe this either; in fact you’re probably arguing right now, “Come on Judy, this is stupid, money can’t possibly come if I don’t work for it and make it.”

And maybe that’s true. But maybe it isn’t. I mean, right now I’m sitting here holding a lovely big check that came totally unexpectedly from my mortgage company, and new clients are coming out of the woodwork, without my trying, just as the time arrives to stop accepting them.

Even so, I’m not saying, “Don’t work. Don’t try to get more.”

It's just that your usual ways of thinking about money aren’t working.

So if only to reduce some of the terror about the future, if only to lighten some of the guilt, shame and self-disgust that comes with not having enough money- it might be time for something different.

Not enough money is hard enough. No need to pile on blame and mean name-calling on top.

So maybe you can start by noticing what it feels like to consider, “What if this money situation is not my fault? What if it’s a flow that has nothing to do with me?”

You don’t have to believe. It’s just a “What if?”

And then, maybe you could notice whether you're literally ok right now, with whatever money you have.

Staying present, just for a bit. Staying literal.

As opposed to imagining and planning for a future which never turns out the expected way anyway, no matter how much planning is done in advance.

You might also see if, even in the past when things seemed dire, you actually had enough and were ok back then too.

You may as well notice the enough-ness already present, even though “not enough” thoughts steal all the attention.

Because enough is what you want, after all, and it might be already here.

Which might feel better.

And then who knows- more money might show up. Or perhaps not.

Either option might not have anything to do with you.

And is it possible, even just a little, even just once in a while, to trust existence to take care of you,

Rather than having to shoulder the entire burden of absolutely everything that happens, yourself?

Separating self, identity, and your very worth as a person,

from what money does or doesn't do.

Who knows? It could turn out to be an excellent start towards

being truly rich

Whether rolling in the bucks or not.

BYPASSING

December 5, 2023

"To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only past and future are considered important. It is always concerned with keeping the past alive, because without it - who are you?"

~Eckhart Tolle

"People want liberation, but they are also terrified of it. If they completely let go, they fear they'll find a dangerous, deluded person underneath it all. The sense of Original Sin is alive and well in us. We think that there's something fundamentally black about our nature, that something monstrous will emerge if we let go. We walk around all day in this virtual reality, physically experiencing what the mind is telling us. If we stop, see through it all, and give it up, what will become of us? It's scary. Everything in the end is a defense against nothingness."

~Adyashanti

My lovely client has been feeling really good.

Peaceful, spacious, quiet, complete, lighter by far.

Y'know, *really* good.

She's kind of amazed, actually.

But then concern sneaks in. Maybe she's feeling *too* good. Maybe there's too much peace.

Surely under all this serenity, there are still unseen realizations, still unresolved trauma.

Maybe this good feeling is (gasp) bypassing.

Bypassing is bad, n'kay?

First, because as we all know, the right way to do life is to feel the hard feelings. Sit with them, validate them, listen to them.

If we want contentment and better feelings later, we must dive into and focus on bad feelings, not good ones, now.

Which is some kind of weird circular reasoning. I mean, isn't that what we ultimately sit with bad feelings *for,* to get spacious good feelings, later?

Yet the good feelings are already here. Without having to wait by dwelling on suffering.

But okay.

Second, we all also know that in order to get shifts in the future, feel good in the future, be *entitled* to feel good in the future…

We must do our work. We must have *AHA*s and realizations and better understandings of our past, our patterns, our inner child, first.

See because, if we're feeling content already, we might not bother with all that important investigation and inquiry. Critical discoveries about self will get prevented, *diverted,* by too much feeling good.

So it's very important to not let peace get in the way of, and bypass, all that pain.

After all, there's no relief that can't be improved by a good dose of efforting.

Then *more* peace, *better* peace, *righter* peace, will surely be ours at last.

No? Then enjoy some extra guilt and worry about doing things wrong. That will also work to eliminate any spaciousness that may have erroneously shown up for a while.

Sigh.

You can see that this everyone-believes-it story about "bypassing" is really just a requirement that the mind be in charge of every darn thing, right? A requirement to ensure that we not go getting all sufficient and complete, without involving the mind?

Even when already experiencing the serenity we've sought for so long.

Because when we label an experience of current good feeling, "bypassing," mind is essentially saying, "Look out! You'll feel bad later, if you feel too good now."

As in, "There will be punishment for your happiness. You will PAY, with deep future pain."

Feeling good is suspicious, feeling good isn't right, feeling good is bypassing.

Don't feel good.

Perhaps we can start to see that peace and contentment actually become downright revolutionary and subversive.

Because they make us *insubordinate* to mind.

Dramatic words, yes. Perhaps true, though.

Still, if this feels like too heretical a perspective, not to worry. No one has to ignore feelings.

Feel them, or don't. They're just feelings. They're not so world-rulingly important.

It's just that maybe *where we put our attention* has always been more shifting than *what we feeeel*.

Maybe once in a while, instead of always focusing attention on attaining the right feeling, we might play with attending to –

--what cares if we bypass,

--what hates one feeling and likes another,

--what feels in the first place, and

--what real thing, realizes.

Y'know, just for fun.

Because shifts happen all kinds of ways.

So that maybe we could relax the need to do things right...

Relax the finger-wagging rule to not bypass...

And trust peace when it does show up.

That could turn out to be

A radical, revolutionary, whole new kind of

Feeling really good.

"Even though I know I'll die
And even though I know the Messiah won't come,
I feel good."

~Yehuda Amichai

"Sometimes I need only to stand wherever I am to be blessed."

~Mary Oliver

BUILD A SELF

December 12, 2023

"Your whole idea about yourself is borrowed; borrowed from those who have no idea of who they are themselves."

~Osho

"Your ideas about yourself change from day to day and from moment to moment. Your self image is the most changeful thing you have."

~Nisargadatta

"'You' and 'he' -- these appear only when 'I' does."

~Bhagavan

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

As my holiday gift to you, I thought it might be nice to learn how to build a self. Kinda like Build-a-Bear, just not quite as cuddly.

Because what better gift than creating a you to BE. Since of course there must be a you.

1) So start by locating the self. In order for you to exist, you have to be somewhere. This requires you to be a thing, an object. Being a thing fills space, avoiding scary emptiness and nothingness.

In fact, cover all bases and create an "inside", too. Call that "inner you," your True Self.

It's changeable, though- the Inner Self's thoughts and feelings vary with the weather. So it can't really be the True one. But still.

Creating this inner you enables there to now be 2 somethings, a true and a false self. Yay for extra emptiness-filling!

Even better, now the inside can be filled up with alcohol and food and an inner child requiring unending attention and problem solving.

Nice!

2) There must be a past. There has to be a creation backstory. "Here I am, and this is how I got here." Tell that story on repeat. Memorize, reinforce, re-live. Use thoughts and images both mental and physical to prove veracity.

Like #1, this also locates and places you. Without a story of a past, there's no way to exist as anything more than a fleeting current experience (as opposed to an experiencER.) There can simply be no you without the past. So replay for a lifetime, the tale of what is long gone.

If it was ever there.

3) Build in importance. Make self the center of everything- dreams, situations, memories, thoughts. Keep attention on this important thing at all times. Support its significance with fault, guilt, blame, shame, and

responsibility. Because hey, Important-You made the mess, Important-You must fix it.

4) Evaluate. Monitor and keep your eye on the self. How's it doing? Is it OK? Is it good enough? Did it do the right thing, does it know what it's doing, does it need more enlightenment, does it need fixing? Well of course it does. Perfect. Get to fixin.

Evaluate and watch your own self, with that very same self. Notice who it's up to, to find and solve the problems of self.

5) Monitor others' thoughts too. Y'know, about you. (see #3.) After all, their thoughts have the power to "make you" upset or happy. Which means their thoughts make you. So regardless of logic or lack thereof, monitor: "Do they like me? Did I impress them, do they think I'm smart, talented, attractive? Do they see me, get me, admire me?"

5a) Attempt to control what others think. About you in particular. Find ways to fool them so they don't discover you're a loser, weak, unlovable, or a failure who never came close to reaching full potential. Whatever that is.

This way, "I'm right about me because others see me and think so too" can be used as further proof of your existence. Never mind those others have an equally urgent investment in believing in you, just like you believe in them.

6) Compare. "Are those others better than I am? Am I ugly compared to them, unliked compared to them, weird, less talented, less enlightened compared to them?" Comparing tells you who you are.

Because that's what everything's about.

7) Make the body's senses top priority. See it to believe it. Hear it. Feel those feelings. Surely that contraction in the chest or that dislike of sadness proves something. How do you know you exist? You see, hear, feel.

8) See your self as uniquely suffering, with flaws which are obviously worse than others'. Insist on that uniqueness ("I'm not like other people, I'm weird, others may also be anxious but mine is worse,") while

simultaneously striving extra-hard to be “normal,” and part of some crowd. The right enlightenment group, the right political side, the right sports team. Be part of a tribe, a family of like-minded others.

Because sure you may esteem being special and different but after all, there’s safety in numbers.

9) Try to live up to concepts like meaning, purpose, goals, goodness, rightness, and potential. I’s not clear exactly what these things are- I mean, they’re not even things- but they seem to be necessary.

10) Resist with all you’ve got, anything and everything that might have potential to help see through the mist, the façade, the fakery of all this. Claim to want to understand while arguing fiercely, angrily, dismissively, that of course you exist, you’re RIGHT HERE!

Let fear and annoyance and looking in all the wrong places deter you from noticing nothingness.

After noticing that fear shows up anytime possible emptiness begins to be sensed,("Oh this is scary!), ask, "Then what IS there? What’s real? What am I?” Get stuck there.

Certainly don’t notice or wait for what might come just after.

Ok, so, fine. Do you ever have to get this? Do you ever have to stop building this bear?

Of course not. Absolutely nothing needs the self to know whether it’s real or not.

Besides, whatever you are, you are already that anyway.

Known or not, understood or not, seen or not, you’re still whatever you are.

Which may or may not turn out to be nothing.

Luckily, nothing cares.

So you may as well enjoy being a well-built and cuddly bear.

And maybe not much else.

RECIPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

December 19, 2023

"Better is the enemy of good enough."

~Voltaire

Wishing you happy holidays, and gifting you this vintage Mind-Tickle from 2017, with love ❤️

It's no secret this time of year is hard for a lot of folks.

Even if it's not that intense for you, or you're not one to annually start looking for the exit, still, who doesn't have at least some nagging sadness, irritation, anxiousness or regret this time of year?

No one, that's who.

Which makes total sense if you look at the recipe for misery that has become an end of year holiday tradition for so many.

1). Expectation. Start with an empty bowl and fill it to the brim.

Asking for much? Nah. Only unrelenting happiness, love and joy! Family, party invitations, smiling, not too drunk faces? Must-haves. Happy happy happy! Never mind that if there are people around, pretty likely they're the very ones that have perfected various button-pushes for years. Y'know, kind of like the annual sharpening of the spears.

2). Comparison. Mix in the whole bottle.

That family member is successful and you're not. That old flame is married and you're not. That one has kids, they still like their parents and aren't addicted to whipped cream. You? No, no and no. Those others are thinner, fitter, younger, prettier, wealthier. They have all their hair, a savings account, more parties, more friends. That one is enlightened, for crying out loud. You? Pfffft.

Dammit.

3) Self evaluation. Fold in a year's worth.

Look backward. How'd you do this year- is this the life you wanted at the end of 2016? Hah. Look at you alone, again, head deep in the pumpkin pie. Did you achieve, find true love, workout, get out of debt, do well as a parent? 'Course not. Loser.

Few of us measure up in the best of times, let alone at this time of "reflection." Aka "Another year gone; what have I done." After all, odds are you're looking at pretty much the same failures as last year. And the year before that.

4) Future. Bake in those resolutions. Time to fix the mess that is your life.

Look forward. Make a list of those finally-get-to-it plans for redemption. Even though you're probably just lining up your failures for next year's step 3 (see above), still, may as well start next holiday season's potential "You blew it's" early. Because c'mon, planning fix-its for the future can always be counted on to bring ease, peace and the end of anxiety. Right?

Mix steps 1 through 4 together thoroughly. Mmmm. Smell the doom, failure and tears along with strong whiskey and/or 420 at this point.

Now that's holiday winning.

And one miserable fruitcake. Not the concoction. You.

Is it any wonder the holidays are less than jolly for so many people? Could there be a more effective ouch-filled recipe?

Not likely.

Although... if it's any consolation, despite thought saying, "It's just you," at least odds are good that everyone else is going through some version of the exact same thing you are. While they're pretending to be joyful, of course. Just like you.

Because for pretty much everyone, the condition of being human comes with thoughts of More, Not Good Enough, and Inadequate Life Accomplishments.

No matter what you've actually got, tried or accomplished.

So for a dash of something different, you might try the following recipe...

Maybe you're right- you're actually not good enough.

Maybe none of us is.

Because no one measures up to a fantasy existence where everything is only sweetness and families sing joy-fueled carols without any glimpse of trigger, or where money, love, happiness and self-esteem are overly plentiful.

So maybe you don't have to try so hard to fake not-possible ideals. Maybe it's possible to finally learn to make do with… this.

And maybe that could be OK.

Because your imperfect messed-up but always interesting personality might just be the ideal personification of what it is to be human.

Which means you fit right in. Perfectly imperfect as you are.

Oh my gosh, could it be you're good enough?

What a crazy concept!

That's why I'm wishing you a giant slice of 'So What, This Is Good Enough' pie.

With extra As-You-Are a la mode.

Yummm.

So from one fruitcake to another….

Love you, and happy good enough.

HOLIDAY GIFT

December 26, 2023

" hate the radio this time of year because they play 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' like, every other song. And that’s just not enough."

~Bridger Winegar

"Everything you've got on your plate is where the stuff for your enlightenment is."

~Ram Dass

"You are already that which is. But your mind is frightened to let go and still has an idea that something special should happen."

~Tony Parsons

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

Ding ding! Holiday time, part two!

Today, The Mind-Tickler comes bearing gifts that never go on sale because they're always in such high demand.

A few readers have written to say, as they sit on Mind-Tickler-Santa's lap asking for their heart's desire, that lately the Tickler has not done enough talking about awakening and consciousness in a direct way.

There's been too much about everyday human life, too much about feelings, too much about thoughts, too much how-do-we-deal-with-this.

Too much brown paper wrapping, not enough sparkly special paper and ribbons.

That's not going to get anyone awakened. Let's get with the enlightenment. Bring on the woo!

Which is understandable. I mean, for many folks it's been yet another year of seeking without finding Enlightenment-Santa and his bag of special treats.

And while it's true that The Tickler uses the struggles of being human as a doorway into the grand cavern of awakened diaper-wearing, meditation-filled caves so many are hoping to enter and never leave,

still, maybe we're tickling the wrong things for the enlightenment chase. Maybe we need to be more direct, more to the point, more obvious.

Maybe more like Rupert, who can squeeze the word "aware" into one small place 4 times.

"Only awareness is aware. Awareness is aware of itself." --Rupert Spira

See? That's how it's done. Take a lesson, Judith.

So in hopes the Tickler can redeem itself, let's catch up by playing a little holiday game. Perhaps this will be the perfect giftie to bring the transcendence so longed for.

So get comfy and close your eyes. Imagine it's cold outside, and snowing. You're all bundled up. Feel the fuzziness inside your mittens, the heaviness of your boots, the icy burn on the cheeks. Smell the crisp air and light snow falling.

Now crunch on up to that nearby house with the warmly lit golden windows and knock on the door. Hear your knock, hear the creak of the opening door. "Ho ho ho!" says the deep voice, "Come in." You enter the warm room, hug Santa and Mrs. Claus, and sit down in front of a warm fire, feeling the glow on your cheeks, watching the snow melting on your boots.

And then, after enjoying hot chocolate laced with a bit of whiskey (smell it?), it's back outside, lifting knees high to clear the snow as you head home. Arriving back at your own door, you sit back in your favorite seat and open your eyes.

There you go! A personal visit to Santa's home. And now back to your own home, reading The Mind-Tickler.

But of course that Santa trip wasn't real. It was just pretend, fantasy, made up. It was imagined. You've been here the whole time.

Right?

But what *is* imagination?

Can you be certain that what just wandered to Santa's house was only a story, not real, and not you, as conscious awareness?

Does consciousness/awareness *(Ding! Extra points for using the words twice in two sentences)* have to look a certain way to be what you're seeking?

Because if not, perhaps the one difference between what is ordinarily called "real" and what isn't…

Is the body. One trip - the one to your chair- moves the body, and one- the one visiting Santa-doesn't.

And as every nondualist knows and has heard a zillion times, we're not the body.

So if what you are is not the body, or housed *in* the body, then

We just took as trip to visit Santa, and it was as real as any trip in your body-moving everyday life.

Without the body as determiner of reality, there's zero difference.

Because consciousness *(ding!)* is everything. It's every color, every sensation, every thought and mental image. It's every idea of you as an individual. It's imagination and ideas and wishes and desires.

It's not just some idealized notion of an altered state of quiet spacey bliss.

Awareness *(ding!)* is not special like having Christmas morning all the time. It's not fancy or rare. It's everyday, everywhere, everything.

It doesn't come with its own secret language either. Or with dings and extra points *(sigh)*.

Daily life is consciousness. Daily life is awareness. Enlightenment lives in the everyday.

Which means the stuff the Tickler often writes about, the stuff that looks like it's just mundane annoying fervently-wish-it-was-different human foibles, is...

exactly what you've been seeking.

Here it is. Consciousness *(ding!)* appearing as you and your loved ones and all those thoughts about the good and bad, the liked and disliked, of all that.

Though you realize of course this also means you are about as real as Santa.

Which may not be the woo you were hoping for. I mean, it's not Rupert or Adya or Tony P., who will happily tell you all this in far more enlightened words that rack up the dings.

Still, it's the Woo That Is. It's the Woo of the Everyday and Everything.

Not grand perhaps, but still consciousness. *(yep- ding!)*

So welcome to what has always been here while you looked everywhere for it.

Please enjoy a cookie on Santa.

Along with all the amazingness of brown paper wrapping,

this and every holiday season.

"That one, You, the only one that truly is, is already Conscious Presence. There is no other one."

~Rupert Spira

"What is Self Realization? A mere phrase. People expect some miracle to happen, something to drop from Heaven in a flash. It's nothing of the sort. Only the notion that you're the body, that you're this or that, will go, and you remain as you are."

~Ramana Maharshi

"When it’s all over, it’s time to be a human being in the world again, and that means slipping back into costume and getting back on stage."

~Jed McKenna

NEW YEAR'S SHOW

January 2, 2024

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women, merely players."

~William Shakespeare

"I admit it's fun
To smear my face with paint,
Causing ev'ryone
To think I'm what I ain't,
Life upon the wicked stage
Ain't ever what a girl supposes."

~Oscar Hammerstein

I hope you'll enjoy this vintage Mind-Tickle from 2020, to start your New Year ❤️

Oh look, resolution time once again! Self improvement time. Annual How'mIDoin? time.

Time to find love, get the better career, learn life's purpose. Time to learn a new word every day, skip gluten and sugar, meditate, work out. Time to figure out how to transcend that Me-sucker.

Oh let's face it, none of that is probably going to happen.

I mean, year after year we see our flaws and insufficiency. And year after year, we never actually get to making with the sufficiency.

You'd think with all these many many New Year opportunities, that we would have improved ourselves by now.

What're we waiting for?

Well, at least we are clear about what needs fixing; that's a good first step, right? We can't fix what we don't know is broken.

Although, how do we know? What is it does this important self-evaluating, this necessary reporting on not-rightness? What tells us we need to being a better person, thinner, kinder, less failure-prone, better able to cope with feelings?

Well, that would be Me. I review me, and I see what I need to alter.

ME. The self. The personality,

The very thing that we're supposed to be changing.

The poor grade is given to itself, by itself.

Um…. What?

I mean, how reliable as an evaluator is the Me likely to be about itself? How can it look objectively, without skewed filters and agendas, to see what is needed and what should improve?

Perhaps New Year's resolutions are an annual failure because they're not meant to actually change anything. Perhaps they're just a way to enable the self to keep the focus on its one great love- itself.

And perhaps, when we focus on something- when we evaluate what that something supposedly needs- then we are implicitly acknowledging that we are outside the thing we're evaluating.

Meaning, we know we are not it. We know that Me we hope to change is not actually us.

Which means every time we make a New Years resolution, we are admitting we know the self is not what we are.

Still, we pretend. And we pretend with gusto. So leaning in, we say that not only is the flawed self, "Me," but cleaning it up and improving it is our own responsibility.

No one can do it but us.

Of course.

Oh the power. Oh the control.

For our very being, for our personality, for all situations and existence pertaining to self.

It all comes down to us. The center of everything.

Even though, let's face it, we completely suck at this job.

I mean here we are, perpetually resolving to change, new year after new year, and here we are, perpetually failing to change, new year after new year.

If improving this pretend self-thing is indeed our job, then we're exhibiting a breath-taking incompetence right there.

Unsurprisingly that doesn't feel great.

So maybe we could at least give ourselves a break and acknowledge that, if it's possible to transcend and change the self at all, we aren't what does that.

That would seem kinder to us.

Since we didn't write this play. And if we were the authors, this isn't how we would have the story go.

We know this because we keep trying to change the story. We keep having the arrogance to insist that this show, which is not written by us, is not good enough as is.

Gosh humans are know-it-alls.

But that's the game here. And play-acting is fun. We like putting on a show in the barn.

So we probably will continue making resolutions for things that are out of our hands and out of our ability to even perceive. We probably will continue to keep the Me on center stage. We probably will continue to keep trying to improve a self story that we didn't create.

Even though we know that improving fictions never fixes anything real.

Life upon the wicked stage goes on.

As is.

The playwright doesn't seem to have any need for the characters to change.

Luckily this makes for amazing, surprising, never-predictable entertainment.

Luckily this makes for a far better show than we could ever produce ourselves. And for far more fun and sufficiency than merely wishing for an arbitrarily different first two weeks in January.

And so it is, lovely readers, that I wish you happy new year.

And happy life as is.

And happy good enough,

here upon existence's

wicked stage.

"We are already divine and we are already perfect - as we are. No improvement is needed. God never creates anybody imperfect."

~Osho

"What if we said, "This is the way it is; this is what it means to be human," and decided to sit down and enjoy the ride?"

~Pema Chödrön

"When it's all over, it's time to be a human being in the world again, and that means slipping back into costume and getting back on stage. But now you're actually in the audience, watching the drama. I could never mistake the play for reality again, or my character for my true state."

~Jed McKenna

COMING OUT OF THE FOG

January 9, 2024

"We miss What Is due to a lack of attention."

~Wu Hsin

"We think it matters what we do."

~Jed McKenna

"The whole cosmos
is going on phenomenally
well today,
but that does not matter.
In your mind
there is one thought –
not too many,
just one –
that is bothering you,
that will depress you
and put you
in the dumps."

~Sadhguru

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

Many years ago I had a young friend who was driving on the highway, arguing with his wife. He pulled over to the side of the road to check on something in his trunk, still arguing all the while. She got out of the car to join him so she could continue the “discussion." And there on the road shoulder, a passing truck hit and killed her.

Instantly whatever they were arguing about suddenly made absolutely no difference to him at all.

Instantly my friend snapped out of his anger at her, as if he had been driving through a fog and then suddenly came out into the clear day.

And of course once out of his fog he remembered how much he loved her. He was devastated, agonizingly guilty, full of regret.

Like my friend's anger before that truck so painfully and immediately sobered him up, all of us experience a similar fog in the various situations life brings. Let's face it, life continually brings hard things.

For most folks, there's a caught-up-in-things sense that whatever is happening to us is ...

Important.

Whether it's big circumstances like death, losing a home to fire, kids taken away, addictions, or all those countless everyday shouldn't-matter-but-do irritations, humiliations, giggles, tears, pains, loves...

we experience everything as if it matters.

Situations appear to matter. Thoughts appear to matter. Feelings appear to matter. Every single thing that happens or doesn't happen to us appears to matter.

All important, all consuming, all absorbing. *Us*.

Importance shrouds everything in fog.

Naturally this doesn't feel great.

And though that not-great feeling is also fog, still, we might be forgiven for yearning to feel better, or for seeking a clearer experience of life.

Which is why today The Tickler offers the following little mind-game to play. Just for a possible brief break from the mist.

Starting with the seemingly obvious and innocuous question, "Do I want peace?"

"Well of course, *duh,*" the mind instantly says without considering.

But... truly? As in, at any cost, at any loss of rightness, identity, certainty?

Because all of that stuff maintains fog. There can be no light of day with any of that.

And then we might ask, "Is it possible to find peace right here right now, in these exact circumstances, just as they are?" Even if it feels like there's something very important going on?

Just asking if it's possible.

Because if so, and if we're really willing to shed the mist, maybe we can move out of the limitations of mattering, and just for a little while...

Go bigger.

Whether we call it consciousness or awareness or God or The Universe or Infinity or Source, we can play with moving attention out from the human

drama, onto whatever it is that's bigger.

See if that "biggerness" holds humans to the same standards that thought does. See if that infuriating political opponent, that scornful person on Facebook, that minus sign on the bank statement, that empty chair across the dinner table, matters-

from a bigger, non-human point of view.

See if whatever is happening is important from that bigger place.

See if existence requires any different experiences, feelings, thoughts.

We might discover an acceptance of whatever is happening, when not steeped in our own significance.

Mind-Tickler readers desiring enlightenment might notice the limitations of these small human viewpoints.

Because when we focus on the small, we necessarily miss the big.

Not that there isn't great value in the small too, as the Mind-Tickler has written previously.

But these simple questions, with no complicated, jargony spiritual discourse, no hours of inquiry, and no meditation or discipline...

might offer a perspective shift that can break the spell of thought, at the least, for a moment.

Because in the end, that's all the fog is anyway. A momentary point of view. A focus. An attention.

Which is lucky. Because attention is much easier to shift than any actual situation.

And might be all we need to avoid the speeding truck.

Not because it’s necessary.

But it does feel better.

And no matter what circumstances come down the road,

there's no rule that says we *must* suffer,

here in this brief small existence.

"The world you perceive is made of consciousness; what you call 'matter' is consciousness itself. You are the space in which it moves, the time in which it lasts, the love that gives it life. Cut off imagination and attachment and what remains?"

~Nisargadatta

"If you want to be free, get to know your real self. It has no form, no appearance, no root, no basis, no abode, but is lively and buoyant. It responds with versatile facility, but its function cannot be located. Then just be ordinary and nothing special. Eat your food, move your bowels, pass water, and when you're tired go and lie down. The ignorant will laugh at me, but the wise will understand."

~Zen Master Lin Chi

"With the attention firmly fixed on the sense of being,
Ask the Only Question.
Do not develop an answer.
Ask the Question and wait.
When a thought intervenes,
Ask the Only Question again.
Then wait.

This continues until one falls off of the floor.
The answer can be told yet it must be seen.
The taste of the orange can be described,
Yet, the orange remains unknown
until it is tasted."

~Wu Hsin

YOU ARE EVERYTHING, AND EVERYTHING IS YOU

January 16, 2024

"Since the universe has no center, you can't be it."

~Neil deGrasse Tyson

"How can anything be, without my conscious presence? Even the elements cannot exist without me - they happen because of my conscious presence. My presence is throughout."

~Nisargadatta

Life in all its infinite variety appears to be happening.

Some are sad or anxious, some have relationship issues or no relationship at all, some struggle with health and physical pain, some don't know how they will cover the rent.

In all these variations, there's one common denominator.

Us.

Let's face it, we're what everything is all about. Even when things seem to be about someone or something else, it still always comes back to us.

For example:

Death: "How do I handle my pain? Who will eat with me, be with me, love me?"

Kids: "Am I ruining their lives? Am I doing the right thing?"

Money: "Am I a loser? Squandering my potential? Making wrong choices? A lazy failure?"

Climate change: "Am I doing enough? Should I recycle more? Stop eating meat? Have I contributed by my behavior?"

Health: "Could I have avoided this cancer? Is this pain my fault? Did I eat too much sugar, not enough kale?"

Politics: "Are they trying to control me, take advantage of me, fool me? Are they on my side?"

We're the center point. Of everything.

Dreams, happenings, non-happenings. All about us, all the time.

Because despite logically understanding that we're just a speck in space, or despite pervasive spirituality saying we're empty and nothing…

we're still pretty darn certain we *are* something. *THE* something, in fact.

Perhaps this is partly why so many people get so irritable at the *There Is No Self* conversations.

Because not only is there quite obviously a self which is clearly *RIGHT HERE* thank you very much, but also because quite obviously, everything is all about it.

Which is why, just for a change, your friendly Mind-Tickler won't try to make the case that we're nothing (which we have done in other Ticklers.)

Since the feeling that *of course we're something*, and everything that matters is *all about* that something, is very very strong.

So instead, let's consider that maybe we've been right all along, and that we are indeed important.

After all, what exactly is there, without little ol' us?

What colors exist without eyes to see it? What sensations are provably there without fingertips and nerve-endings? What sounds can exist without ears?

Consciousness needs something to be conscious *OF*.

To do that, consciousness needs hardware- eyes, ears, nose, skin, etc. of all living things.

Without this hardware, there's nothing. Nothing can be experienced, without it.

We bring all that to the table.

So hey, it seems we do matter.

We may be small in the universe, but we are mighty in that way.

Our existence, experiences, preferences and unique-to-us characteristics provide consciousness with an infinitely rich experience.

And going a step further in our exploration, setting aside the usual centralized *This is happening to Me Me Me* for a moment,

Could it be we're even *more* than a necessary requirement for consciousness to have itself a party?

Because if we are experience itself, rather than the one it happens *to,* or the one who witnesses,

then we *are IT,* itself.

Consciousness, as experience.

Tears, pains, laughters, deaths, cheating partners, money fears. Colors, shapes, sounds, feelings, thoughts. Planets, existence, God, the universe.

Everything.

All IT.

All us.

Which would mean we're not *in* a life, or *having* a life, or experiencing a life, or thinking about a life, or witnessing a life.

But actually life itself. Experience itself. Consciousness itself.

Little insignificant us. Literally the fulcrum in which everything happens.

In which case, there's only one thing.

And that thing is us.

Can't get more important than that.

See? We knew it!

Although that would mean we're not in one locatable place. But hey, being everything everywhere is still kind of OK, isn't it?

I mean, talk about special. Talk about mattering. Talk about significant.

Talk about everything.

Look at us!

Wow.

"I've come to the realization that the only way to find it is to BE it."

~Alan Watts

"Experience is real, but real as Consciousness, not real as an object."

~Rupert Spira

"There is no personal self, and everything is myself. It appears to be a paradox. We find we are nothing and absolutely everything simultaneously."

~Adyashanti

SHAME

January 23, 2024

"There is a sensation, and you say that you are depressed or unhappy or blissful, jealous, greedy, envious. This labeling brings into existence the one who is translating this sensation."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"ou’re trying to straighten out a wiggly world and no wonder you’re in trouble."

~Alan Watts

Years ago while in an important business meeting, crowded with higher-ups, a client laughed at a joke. This caused her to let loose... a fart. A loud, un-ignorable one.

Telling the story all this time later, her face still turns red.

Another friend wanted to impress someone, and in front of him she tripped and tumbled into a puddle, ending up covered head to toe in mud. She impressed him alright.

Another friend did a TV interview and suddenly her old stutter came back. Live, with thousands of people watching,

Oh the shame.

The bad skin, the freckles, the excess body hair in weird places. The buttons opened, the zipper down, the dress hiked up. Clapping alone and calling "Bravo!" when the concert isn't over. Saying 'Love you!' instead of "See ya!" to a stranger. Spectacularly missing the ball when the whole team is counting on you to win the game.

Who hasn't experienced stories like this? No one that's who.

And what do these stories all have in common?

I mean, besides the why-isn't-the-ground-swallowing-me-right-now part.

Well for one thing, everyone thinks it's our fault that these things happen. We should have known. We should have stopped it. We shouldn't be so strange, stupid, clumsy, wrong. We should have done better.

As if we missed that ball on purpose. As if we chose to fart like a trumpet in front of the big boss.

It was our job to stop it, and we blew it.

So to speak.

These situations all appear to be mighty darn personal.

Even though they happen precisely when we don't have the power or the responsibility we think we're somehow supposed to have.

So clearly it's not personal. Even though we think it is.

Because we can't stop it.

Lord knows we would if we could.

I mean, watch the high-falutin' spiritual concept of, *I'm not the doer* go right out the window in these situations.

While our obvious lack of agency threatens to expose that we are just powerless nothings that can't control anything.

Actually, that's the part we're ashamed of -- the lack of control itself.

And then, for added fun, there's more.

Because to get a good shame going, we have to be *caught* not having control. Others have to *see* our lack of power.

Which is why a loud fart when we're alone in the car is no problem.

No witness, no shame.

Being seen is what brings the red face.

Being exposed. As powerless. In prime time.

Oh the self hates it so much.

It hates being seen to be nothing.

Because there's no putting that back in the hat. The bunny gets out. And it poops on everything- on the sense of control, the sense of self, the image, the presentation, the pretense that we're a person in control of our body, our story, our world.

Everything in danger of vanishing.

Dammit.

To hell with all this enlightenment-seeking, lose-the-ego, see-through-the-self stuff. Bring on the high barricades and heavy-duty protection.

Enter shame.

"OMG look what I just did!" we say, taking credit for having done... something. And the Me turns red, cringes and wishes for a quick death.

While actually being secretly delighted.

Because in that moment, the hard-won, mind-created world is in zero jeopardy of being seen through.

Because we are far too busy dealing with shame.

Mission accomplished.

On the plus side, this is potentially good news for those hoping to experience what many call "enlightenment."

Because when we begin to get a glimmer that the situation itself is a front, the Me is a front, and the intense feeling of shame is a front and a cover-up…

When we can look behind any of this for even the merest moment,

We might begin to see that there's simply

Nothing

There

Behind the facade.

Which is such a surprising relief,

And requires no face.

Red or otherwise.

"You realize that you're no one and you've been trying to be someone. You just die and die into the truth of that. You die into what you have done and who you have been, and it's a very sweet thing; there's no guilt or shame in it. You become totally vulnerable, like a little child. Defense and justification keep falling away, and you die into the brilliance of what is real."

~Byron Katie

HEY I'M ENLIGHTENED!

January 30, 2024

"The person who says, “I’m enlightened,” probably isn’t."

~Ram Dass

Recently I was asked, for about the zillionth time, if I’m enlightened.

What to say, what to say...

Both “yes” or “no” are lousy options.

Say no and I’m dismissed; the asker moves on to the next magician who has better sleight of hand than moi *(pretty much everyone)*.

Say yes and… Oh! Hear the trumpets? See the confetti? Yay me! So special!

Hmmm. That couldn’t be ego and apparent confirmation of the superior, separate, individual self, right?

Uh oh.

Could be I don’t have what I’m claiming to have.

Plus, then the unenlightened questioner gets to compare what they supposedly don’t have, to what I supposedly do.

Confirming their own deficiency, lack and emptiness as an individual, while putting me on a pedestal of envy.

So my *yes* tidily confirms both of our senses of identity and personhoods, and neither of us sees through the self illusion.

Great.

Of course this assumes that we even agree on what enlightenment *is*, or that it can actually be attained.

Which most likely, we don't.

Frankly, what most folks seek to "attain" is nonstop, permanent, never-reacts, bliss.

Even though no one- not even the sainted Ramana - has ever actually achieved said non-reactivity, permanently.

And even though "attaining" inherently means getting- as in, it's missing and needs to be gotten. Which means the present is lacking.

Which means, um… no.

But let's pretend for a moment that everyone does agree on the definition of awakening.

Let's say everyone knows that enlightenment is the actual experience that we are everything- every sound, every sensation, every color.

Not *nothing,* but rather, *everything*.

And let's say everyone has truly seen that the world, self, seen objects, and felt senses, are 100% illusion, and that the constant, arbitrary establishment of a person, a location, a stance, doesn't actually, *in any way,* exist.

Got it?

(checks watch) Transformed yet? Transcended yet?

Or is the usual desire for a better existence and a better experience, with better feelings, better knowledge, better awareness and better evolution, still

alive and well?

Right.

Still, people do find comfort in grabbing onto some teacher's words and then pretending to have experienced some of that claimed magic for themselves.

Though this makes them not enlightened, but parrots. And fakers. And rule-followers trying very hard to stay in the box and do things right.

As opposed to transcending the box.

Not that there's anything wrong with this. It's just not a happy place for the seeker.

Because what is sought cannot be found this way. If it can be found at all.

Luckily not one bit of this matters.

Because the answer to, "Are you enlightened?" is a *yes* for everyone.

No one *becomes* enlightened, because everyone already is.

We are all, already, not the self.

This may not be "known." But *knowing* involves the mind. *Realizing* involves the mind. *("Realize" = makes real = Not it)*

So knowing isn't necessary, and changes nothing.

So… am I enlightened?

What's asking? What cares? And whatever it is, does it need to attain this realization?

Nah. It's complete already.

As are we all.

With or without

An Answer

To a useless question.

"What if you're a zombie right now and believing you're not is just one of the symptoms?"

~Jed McKenna

ART OF REALITY

February 6, 2024

"All creation, streaming out of the Self,
Is only the Self."

~Ashtavakragita Gita

Recently someone on social media wrote to me.

“Do you agree that ”Perception is reality?” My perception can't be trusted. I need a touchstone when I am off kilter. I surround myself with trustworthy individuals who help reorient me. What do you think of that?”

Well. Since he asked...

I think someone thinks certain individuals know more truth than he, and that they can put him right (per their version, of course).

I think someone thinks certain others are better oriented (whatever that is) and don’t have off-kilter thoughts.

Also, I think someone thinks I am a trustworthy individual.

Oh dear. Should I tell him, or just leave him to his little illusions?

Either way, his question already contains its answer.

Since no human can ever know anything outside whatever our physical hardware (eyes, ears, skin etc) and conditioning is capable of perceiving.

These are sieves which create a highly unique, very individualized sense of existence.

Which gives consciousness a one-of-a kind, infinitely varied experience.

No human is exempt from this.

Including gurus, teachers and sages. They have filters, biases and conditioning too.

They have points of view, inclinations and mind-sets.

Theirs.

Their opinions are the exact same biased, filter-based, fluffy nothings as ours.

Which is why there are no "trustworthy individuals" who are clearer or less off-kilter than anyone else.

So yes, perception is reality.

Though it's strictly *our* perception, our reality.

Not *real* reality.

It's a very specifically individual, one-off reality.

Which some might find distressing. Because no human will ever actually know what reality is.

Or even *IF* it is.

After all, is it truly reality if it varies from individual to individual?

I mean, anyone who has ever taken a life drawing class has seen that the view and resulting drawings completely vary depending on where in the room the artist's easel stands.

Same model, same pose. Yet as many different drawings as there are easels.

Which artist is right? Which easel position provides more truth than the other easels? Which artist sees reality?

Yeah.

No one has The Answer.

Reality is a concept, and an unprovable one at that.

Which might be good news.

Because it means our own perspectives are just as true and rich and full of wow! as any guru's.

So maybe we can let up on trying to standardize this vast, infinite variety into some notion of "reality."

Maybe we can enjoy the placement of our own easel,

And enjoy both the enormity... and the smallness... of our individual viewpoints.

Because we are the only one,

Literally the *only* one,

Who can be our particular iteration

Of consciousness.

And *that* is one helluva work

Of art.

"The total number of minds in the universe is one. In fact, consciousness is a singularity phasing within all beings."

~Erwin Schrodinger

LOVE CONNECTION

February 13, 2024

"What is this love that we love so much? The love of one ego for another? Of one false self for another? My avatar loves your avatar? My lie loves your lie? Is it a person we love or love itself?"

~Jed McKenna

When I was little, I daydreamed about falling in love and having a happily ever after. I spent hours conjuring my prince- what he looked like, what his name was, what he wore, what candy he'd bring me.

I longed for this. At age 6.

I guess we're never too young to believe that the answer to the perfect life is out there waiting.

And that it would look like love.

Because we humans sure do love romantic love.

We love having someone to keep company with us, share experiences with us, be kind to us, understand us, support us, bring out the best in us.

We love having someone listen to us, hear us, look at us, see us. We love having someone care about us, have a feeling in their chests...

Y'know, about us.

I mean, we even love our pets because they love us.

Noticing a pattern here?

Oh no. Say it ain't so, Mind-Tickler.

Say it's not so that romantic love turns out to be yet another way just to think about our selves all the time.

Say it's not so that love is actually about getting others to be as all-about-me as we are.

I mean, when we think about the loves in our lives, does not every one of them come down to, "Do they think about me, do they feel the right things about me, are they nice to me? Am I getting what I need and want?"

And if we think about those situations where love somehow didn't have something to do with us, then we said, "No thanks. I'm outta there and on to someone better. For Me." And then hello break-up, divorce, cheating.

Maybe next time we'll do things righter and find the right one- someone who will take us in better, and give us the validation we deserve.

Someone who will confirm Me.

Someone who will reify this self and put it center stage.

Damn.

We've contorted even love, that great connector of individuals into a greater whole, into a way to enhance and reinforce separate individuality instead.

Which, though convoluted, does make sense really.

Because we seemingly separate personalities do feel a powerful yearning to connect with something greater. We strongly desire that full sense of union, of blending. We long to get back to what we really are, to what *isn't* separate, to what *isn't* individual..

Yet at the same time...

What self-respecting individual really wants to invalidate the Me, lose the ego, "die to the self," and blend into nothing?

Thanks and no.

Now I know reading this might not be fun. Or dreamy.

In fact, it's the opposite of dreamy.

It's awake-y.

And most often, these personalities don't like that. We'd much rather sleep in a little longer, please.

Which is why love of any kind feels so darn good.

Because it might be the closest we can get to holding onto that story of Me and also feeling part of that whole, that bigger-than-us-something.

Love might be the best we can do to merge somehow and yet still hold onto these *C'mon-I'm-Me* stories of individual.

Certainly back when I was a kid, that connection so full, so all-encompassing, so filling, that I could die from the fullness and bliss-

That's what I actually craved.

Not that I knew that then.

And of course 6-year olds are usually not consciously aware of the connection they already have, and already are.

So for all of us seemingly separate persons, thank goodness for love.

Because seeing through self, seeing the wispiness of these apparently personalities, is not for every one.

Love offers apparent individuals a way to come close...

Very close...

Very very close....

Without actually having to meet...

Or kill...

The Buddha.

"This is love:
to fly toward a secret sky,
to cause a hundred veils to fall each moment.
First, to let go of life.
In the end, to take a step without feet;
to regard this world as invisible,
and to disregard what appears to be the self..."

~Rumi

PERSONAL SCRIPTS

February 20, 2024

"Accept your lot and make your mother happy. Run fast and make your god happy."

~Ancient Sumerian text, approx. 3000 BC

"There are no new thoughts.”"

~Byron Katie

You think it’s just you.

Or at least you have it worse than others, and your situation is especially bad.

Or maybe you grant that others do also suffer the same unfortunate afflictions in life, so you bond with them in solidarity against those normal different others who don’t suffer this way.

That's when you join the autism group, the anxiety group, the positive-thinking mailing list. That’s when you try the dating sites, sign up for podcasts about getting motivated, log in every night to the, “I’m enlightened and you’re not” groups.

You may think your issues are particular to you. But sit in my chair for a day or two and you start to notice that everyone says the same things. About

the same kinds of troubles.

In fact, it's always the same handful of topics people end up discussing- self doubt/self improvement, success/achievement/productivity, love/relationships/others, health/death, addictions/cravings, and enlightenment/how to live life best.

All the usual stuff, showing up as feelings, goals, desires, shoulds, shouldn’ts, likes and dislikes.

Turns out that when thoughts revolve around a recurrent set of limited topics, humans suffer.

All humans. Humans such as you.

Which is weird. I mean, you’re unique, right?

Well, your kind of suffering must be a new phenomenon. Or maybe the current mass suffering of so many folks is a product of difficult current times, personal traumatic childhoods, the barrage of media and technology.

“Life is suffering.” –Buddha, approx. 625 BC

Oh.

Apparently it’s *not* new. Since Buddha lived about 2700 years ago.

In fact, dig back a little and it begins to be clear that people have been struggling with the exact same problems, saying the same exact stuff you say, about the same exact challenges,

For at least 8100 years. Al least as far back as they’ve found written words.

Thoughts identical to the ones you’re lugging around have literally been around at least 8000 years.

So at least you’re in good company. *Old* company, but still.

That thought about not being productive, or good enough, or lovable? The one about whether you should have another beer, or what other people think, or whether you're ugly or healthy or safe from death? The thought about whether you meditate enough or have achieved enough enlightenment, if your parents did you wrong, or if life has been too hard or if feelings could be escaped by death?

Ancient. Thousands of years old.

Bringing that old spiritual maxim, "Thoughts aren't personal," to a whole new level.

Because thousands-of-years-old thoughts can not be about you.

Childhood traumas, or cravings for booze, or fear of disapproval, or anger at others' obviously wrong behaviors, can't be about you or your life if they were also about Gilgamesh the Sumerian's life in 3000 BC.

Thoughts like, "*I can't bear this feeling, maybe I should die,"* or, *"I'm not reaching full potential, I'm failing at life, love, enlightenment,"* can't have anything to do with you, if they were Shakespeare's lines for Hamlet in 1595, or in Aeschylus' scripts in approx. 500 BC.

"It would be better to die once and for all than to suffer pain for all one's life." —Aeschylus, 500 BC

"Nobody lives the life he chooses to live." —Menander, 4th cent. BC

Hmmmm. Seems you're very very late to the, "It's all me and mine," party.

It becomes clear that suffering has a script. Being human has a script.

A script which is not particular to any one person's life situations. A script which carries on over centuries, independent of any life's particular circumstances and feelings.

With words like, "My thoughts" and "My inner voice," you have claimed authorship to what is not yours.

Fine. How does it matter?

Well, it doesn't. Unless you like sanity.

Unless you'd like freedom from a lifetime of hating yourself, fixing, "going inward," striving and never attaining.

Because once it's seen that all thought is ancient and repetitive and scripted,

there's no way to continue thinking it's you in particular with the problem.

There's no way to continue thinking suffering is about your trauma or your cheating spouse or your inherent lack of value.

It starts to be clear that it's just your turn to read the ancient lines.

Taking the you right out of it.

"Humans are born, they live, then they die, this is the order that the gods have decreed. But until the end comes, enjoy your life, spend it in happiness, not despair. Savor your food, make each of your days a delight, bathe and anoint yourself, wear bright clothes that are sparkling clean, let music and dancing fill your house, love the child who holds you by the hand, and give your wife pleasure in your embrace. That is the best way for a man to live."

— *The Epic of Gilgamesh, 3400 BC*

This is good news.

Because separate self-sense hurts, unique person-ness hurts, laying claim to what isn't yours, hurts.

Because it's a lie.

When instead, you are a swept-along part of an ancient, common, *universal,*

so much bigger,

so much older,

than any one person’s

non-personal experience.

And that's a script that just might

stick around awhile.

"Hey, let’s put on a play in the barn!"

~Scriptwriters for Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland

YOUR POINT AND PURPOSE

February 27, 2024

"What does the orange tree
Have to do
To grow oranges?
What does the sky
Have to do
To be blue?
What do you
Have to do
To be?"

~Wu Hsin

"There are no new thoughts."

~Byron Katie

If only I had a dollar for every time a client has said, “What’s the point of my life? I need a purpose. Otherwise why get out of bed?”

I’d be writing the Mind-Tickler from my yacht right about now. (Of course you’d be more than welcome to join me in some pointless pina coladas.)

Yes, that’s how many folks are convinced that they need a point in order to have a worthwhile life.

Now of course, for every other creature on this amazingly diverse planet, it's enough to simply be alive.

I mean, what other living thing needs a purpose? Do mosquitoes need a purpose? Cats, toads, scorpions, raccoons?

Nah.

But for humans, it's, "No no no, I need more than mere life. I need a *point*."

Though really, what for?

It's not like purpose brings us peace.

On the contrary.

Rather than the beautiful meaningful life that thought insists will come because we have a purpose,

In actuality we get stress, striving, dissatisfaction, failure and inadequacy.

Oh boy.

Yes, do something worthwhile! Make something useful happen! Be important, be significant! Stop sitting around and start *mattering,* dammit!

Sure. Peaceful.

But perhaps that nagging sense of empty where purpose is supposed to be, that need to figure it all out, is in itself...

the point of needing a point.

Because the idea that we need purpose certainly succeeds at focusing us single-mindedly on self, and its wrongness, and its not-enough-ness.

Always dissatisfied. Perpetually lacking.

Which is kind of too bad, really. Since Life does seem to be ok with our pointless selves.

And especially since existence may not be *about* anything at all.

After all, life comes, it goes, it ebbs, it flows. All shapes, sizes, webbings, claws, fingernails, number of toes. All thoughts, feelings, and grand concepts like "purpose."

It's all pretty darn random. And none of it required to make a lick of sense.

I mean, ever seen a lobster? A fly? A tardigrade?

Yeah.

None of it's permanent or significant.

None of it is required to earn its right to simply exist for a while.

And then along comes Crazy Human, thinking it needs to deserve and *qualify* for this life which it didn't even ask for to begin with.

Oh, so much 'ouch' in that demand.

And meanwhile, while we are busy complicating existence with thoughts of Point…

We live. Anyway.

Just because.

Like every living creature. Experiencing anything. Experiencing everything.

Alive.

For now.

And then…

Next.

So why get out of bed in the morning?

Because we do.

Because why not.

Because life happens.

And because nothingness makes no demands.

Silly humans.

"The meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves."

~Alan Watts

FINDING YOUR OWN

March 4, 2024

"Many people think that it is the function of a spiritual teaching to provide answers to life's biggest questions, but actually the opposite is true. The primary task of any good spiritual teaching is not to answer your questions, but to question your answers."

~Adyashanti

"You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist."

~Friedrich Nietzsche

The woman on social media asked how she should handle facilitating spiritual inquiry when her clients didn't follow the rules. The post got almost a hundred replies, each commenter so eager to tell how they did things, to show off what they knew.

Finally the original poster was asked, "What are you currently doing in this situation, what has worked for you?"

Turned out she already knew exactly what to do, and she was already doing it.

Yet she deferred to everyone else's wisdom.

Fast forward to a couple of months ago, where here at Mind-Tickler headquarters, we discussed how many seekers turn to teachers to give them answers, in satsang, on social media, in retreats and zooms and podcasts. We discussed how, by asking sages for their points of view, folks check their own wisdom at the door.

That Tickler said, in essence, *ask yourself* rather than hanging on every word or quoting every utterance of some wise one. Because how can surprises happen *for you* when you're trying to fit your own experience into someone else's box?

Since that Tickler, many have written me to ask, "But *how?* How do I ask myself?" They feel caught in the mind's loops. Their answers don't seem right, don't match the gurus', aren't liked.

"The mind is too powerful," they say.

Now maybe it's true that the mind, left to itself, goes round and round the same maypole forever. Maybe it's true that some kind of outside input is necessary in order to be able to step outside the minds' usual hamster wheel.

Or maybe it's not.

What is certain though, is that if answers are not found *by you*, they can never be yours. They're someone else's. All you can do is borrow them.

Perhaps part of what has gotten in the way is that you're trying to understand. You want comprehension, you want realizations, you want ahas, rather than seeing or being or experiencing. But understanding is dependent on the mind. Understanding is, by definition, intellectual.

Maybe what is needed, in order to discover different-than-usual answers, is different-than-usual questions.

So today, just for fun, here are a few possibly-new questions to play with.

Let's be clear that they're not inquiries, not a practice, not a system, not a method, not a way.

They're just some random questions. Maybe you'll find them mind-opening.

Note that these questions include no whys or what's-the-meanings or explanations of how some past trauma brought xyz to happen. That kind of rehashing affirms established conclusions rather than offering something new.

Also, consider bringing these tips as you play with these queries:

• As mentioned in that previous Tickler, be extremely literal. If you say, "There's a sense," - *where? Where is this "sense"?* Literally point to it. If it doesn't hold up to literal, then consider the possibility it's imagined and not actually *any*where.

• Don't answer with theory. Theory is still someone else's answer, pretending to be your own. That's you trying to do things right, not an actual answer.

• Also don't try to make theory prove preconceived beliefs. "It's energy." "It's the mind." "It's a thought." What does any of that mean, exactly?

• Watch for the inclination for debate with yourself, with the questions, with the answers. You don't have to believe, you don't have to agree, you don't have to figure out if the answer that comes is true. If you're going to evaluate and weigh every answer for whether you agree, it will not be possible for anything new to get past that sieve.

It doesn't matter if you are right. You won't be able to tell anyway.

• Watch for "buts" and "feels likes." Both change the subject and turn your answer right back to where you started. Both are huge contributors to that sense that you're stuck.

So in no particular order:

1) What if this happening, this personality style, this feeling, this thought, is not my fault or doing?

It's just a WHAT IF. Watch mind insist it's all your your fault and responsibility. Watch it fight hard to blame and accuse you. Watch it get furious at the idea that everything, good or bad, might not revolve around all-important you.

2) Is it possible that this, as it is, is good enough? Is it possible that I, as I am, am good enough?

This isn't asking if you like it, or if you're where you want to be, or if you're good, or if you've "got it." This is asking, is it *good enough?* Can you make do with less than perfect? If not, why not? Is your self too special to be imperfect like everything and everyone else?

3) Does existence/life/awareness (whatever word works for you) have a problem with me? As I am? Feeling into it, how does life/awareness/existence feel about me, no matter how screwed up, or how terrible a person I may be? What does existence feel about me?

Are you ever going to know if your answer to this is correct? Of course not. Correctness is not what this question is for.

4) Is this all there is?

Try answering *YES*. Wait out the tantrum, the, "But I don't Liiiiike it." Stay with *YES,* consider that possibility, and watch what happens.

5) Is this situation important? Literally?

Not, "It's important to *me*." What's that mean, anyway? Take you out of the equation for a minute and relook- how important is it if you're not the center of the universe?

6) What would my answers be if "But" or "Feels like" didn't exist?

7) How is this situation or feeling being used to define me, to tell me who or what I am?

"This means I am (insert word here)…" Does any situation actually know what you Are? What even cares what you Are? What is so intent on defining

what you Are?

8) What if I'm not real even though I'm absolutely positively most definitely certain I am?

Rather than all the grand debates about whether I AM or I AM NOT, just consider the possibility that you're not only not what you think, but that you're *not, at all*. What's that feel like? What happens? Then what? If there's a big resistance and irritation, what benefits from that?

There are more, and these are good starters just for fun.

Will these questions take you to enlightenment? Well, I'm not sure exactly where that is, but if it means hanging out on some chaise lounge at a mystery beach somewhere, I'm in.

Will these questions get you what you want?

They're just questions, they're not a genie.

Do I know what you'll find?

No.

I know what I found.

And your way will be

gloriously different.

"You want your purveyors of Truth
To look and act special.

You want them different
And separate
And powerful.

You prefer to imagine them
Cloaked in light
Than sitting on the toilet.

You like them passionless, sexless, Mellow, gentle and kind.

You like the idea of miracles
And will invent them when necessary.

Your strategy is to keep them
Out there
Far away from you
Exotic and mysterious.

You revel in the myth
Of the Enlightened individual
Hoping to someday be so empowered.

What you can't tolerate
Is for them to appear
As ordinary as you."

~Ram Tzu (aka Wayne Liquorman)

"Only if you reject all the other paths can you discover your own path."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

PAST TRAUMA

March 12, 2024

"We tend to regard ourselves as puppets of the past, driven along by something that is always behind us."

~Alan Watts

"Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in."

~Mario Puzo

Pretty much everyone, including probably you, has accepted the idea that past traumas are stored somewhere in us, waiting in an unseen dark place for opportunity to spring out and make us suffer.

Common wisdom is that the past is embodied, even encoded into our cells.

While waiting to somehow be "resolved," before allowing us to move on to a contented life, this painful past rules and controls our lives.

That makes this "past" stuff some powerful voodoo, no?

Though if we actually looked with new eyes at that belief-bug swimming in the Kool-Aid, we might discover that it's not only not there, but also really makes no sense.

First, because there's tons of research that shows that what we call memories are actually just a few tiny, vague, split-second *current-moment* mental images, strung together by thought and concocted into a cohesive narrative. *(No need to believe me. There's always Mr. Google.)*

Turns out, no matter how real it feels, or how certain we are that we remember accurately, or how many people verify our tale…

no one remembers the actual past.

The science is very clear. Memories are completely made up.

But even if this was not the case, and even if what we think happened really did happen,

then logically, the wonderful stuff that happened is *also* stored in the DNA, and *also* rules our present.

Which means it's not only our miseries that are formative. Yet we're only interested in the suffering. We're not dredging up the good stuff.

Meanwhile, it's not like we haven't given trauma work and therapy and sitting with feelings a really good long try. Yet here we are anyway, still thinking we're ruled by memories and pain and carrying them around forever.

Not to mention all that stewing, dissecting, validating and repeatedly summoning up the past- how exactly is that supposed to make things better?

I mean, if it actually did improve things, there wouldn't be any folks left who are still dealing with trauma.

Everyone would have therapized it all away already.

Under guise of "healing," repeatedly rehashing and re-feeling, over and over and over, this focus is actually re-opening scabs and holding pain in place.

Which I'm pretty sure is the opposite of what we want.

So maybe we could be open to something different. If only because the pain-is-in-there-forever idea is pretty darn miserable.

What if it was possible to say, “OK, yes, this bad thing happened. And now it’s over. Now what? Moving on. Next brand new experience coming right up.”

That would be different, wouldn’t it?

And if, right about here, the mind screams outrage for this simple, “Now what?” question, we might consider why it’s so eager to hold on to a story that brings so much pain.

Why is it so completely uninterested in not hurting?

This may even be where objections about “bypassing” come up.

But bypassing can only be a problem if one buys into the *Pain-Is-Lying-In-Wait* story. Without that, it’s not “bypassing,” it’s just “feeling better.”

Which I'm pretty sure would be ok with us.

Maybe all this time, we've been freer of the past than we thought.

Maybe we can finally be allowed to shift focus, feel better, and move on to present-focused, rather than past-focused, life and experiences.

Maybe we can finally be allowed to leave past trauma in the stuffy stagnant land of, “Maybe or maybe not, it's long ago either way.”

Which might be startling to a mind that likes to hoard and rehash its troubles and suffering, forever.

But can still be amazingly free when we open the windows and let the breeze blow through...

Experiencing, alive,

and completely new

in every second.

"We think that the world is limited and explained by its past. We tend to think that what happened in the past determines what is going to happen next, and we do not see that it is exactly the other way around! What is always the source of the world is the present; the past doesn't explain a thing. The past trails behind the present like the wake of a ship and eventually disappears."

~Alan Watts

"The past has no power to stop you from being present now. Only your grievance about the past can do that. Die to the past every moment. You don't need it."

~Eckhart Tolle

"There is neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will be also the present when you experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Have a complete break with the past and see what happens."

~J. Krishnamurti

UGH, THIS IS IT

March 19, 2024

"Stop acting so small. You are the universe in ecstatic motion."

~Rumi

Disciple: "Sir, I want to get liberated."
Ramana: "You Are Ever Liberated."

Curtain opens. Scene begins.

Client: I have an intense curiosity in this enlightenment stuff.

Judy: Ok! What for? What do you think it's going to do for you?

C: I think it involves relief, a safe haven from suffering. I yearn for understanding.

J: So "understanding" will help you to not suffer anymore?

C: Yes

J: Ever? So like if your child dies, no reaction?

C: Well…

J: Sounds like valium.

C: In a way I guess.

J: Why not just take valium? It's quicker and more reliable.

C: I just want to know what people are talking about.

J: I get it, you're missing out on something wonderful! So who are these people talking about this fabulous state you don't have?

C: Well, you. And (another writer.)

J: Me? But I say repeatedly, in no uncertain terms, "This is it." (The other writer) does also. We both use those exact words. How does *This is it* come to mean there's some *other It* than this, some magical, happier *It* that you're missing out on?

"This is it," turns into, "Yeah I like what Judy says. Judy has a different, better *It* than I have. She can help me not suffer." Is that correct?

C: Well,

J: Ok, so, do you think consciousness includes suffering? Or does consciousness include everything *except* that?

C- No, it's all included.

J: And, is there anyone who doesn't suffer sometimes?

C: No, everyone suffers.

J: OK, so there's no evidence that not-suffering is even possible, and consciousness includes it all.

Yet you'd rather reject the experience that's here already anyway, because it includes suffering, to yearn for an imagined *not-here* which excludes suffering.

Even though consciousness *includes* what you want to *exclude*.

Gosh, I can't imagine why you haven't found what you're searching for.

End scene.

Whew.

It is astonishing how many conversations like this I have.

All over the world, within all kinds of so-called spiritual approaches…

People are trying to make consciousness small.

People are trying to squeeze consciousness down to something smaller than themselves, in order to contain and handle all that enormity.

By leaving out the suffering. By leaving out the anger, fear, pain, shame, guilt, resistance.

Thereby paring down incomprehensible inclusiveness to a more manageable size.

Somehow we've come to believe that we can dictate our preferred terms of experience, and thereby become larger than consciousness. We want to become the *owner* of consciousness.

"By my efforts and my preferences, I shall attain awareness. I shall know consciousness and harness it for my bliss."

As if we can rein it in. As if we have any leverage at all to make things to our liking.

When actually, It owns us.

Because we are in *It*.

We are *of* it. We *are* it.

Literally.

This *It* is us.

This color is us. This sound is us. This thought, this feeling- this sadness, fear, resistance, joy, bliss, calm…

Us, us, us.

It, It, It.

Nothing - not even suffering- can be left out without diminishing ourselves.

And diminishing is not possible.

Because *It* includes all.

Which means *we* include all.

And that

is as *IT*

as it gets.

"Nothing happens next. This is it."

~Zen saying

SEEKING CONSCIOUS OTHERS

March 26, 2024

"There are no others. Whatever you see on the outside is your own reflection. Your mind is creating all this."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Work out your own salvation. Do not depend on others."

~Buddha

People who are into enlightenment often feel like they can't relate to non-enlightened folk. They yearn for others who think about the same things. They wish for companions who see things the same way. Without like-minded others they feel lonely, disconnected, and separate from non-awake others.

Irony, anyone?

And it's not like it's so easy to connect with the right kind of others. Scan through some of the Consciousness groups on Facebook and watch a few zillion takes on Truth show up. There are inquirers and shamans and crystal lovers and manifesters and Advaitans and Buddhists and positive thinkers and sit-with-feelings-ers and scholarly readers and disciplined orange-robed meditating this-is-the-only-way-ers.

Ever try to truly connect with someone whose version of spirituality is different from yours?

Yeah, that's not any less alone, is it?

So people gather into "schools of thought." Kind of like the Sorting Hat at Hogwarts.

But ... this doesn't make sense. How can connectedness only be possible when there are shared interests? That's not very connected, is it?

It's starting to appear that people might be using apparent common interest in consciousness to define … *themselves*. Y'know, as individuals.

Separating the world into, "You're in," and "You're out."

Which kind of contradicts that little enlightened idea of no separation, no?

Not to mention those many consciousness explorers who've come to think that having that interest makes them special in some way. Superior, almost. Y'know, a few steps above those poor stuck non-awake non-spiritual types.

Hey, no ego in that, right? No separation, individualization, identity there.

'Course not.

Just looked at logically, it's pretty clear that if awakening is what is sought, it's not going to be found in the divided Us-Them teams of conscious people vs not-conscious people.

In fact it's very possible that the thought, "I need people around me who think the same as I do," actually creates the sense of isolation, rather than being its result.

Maybe "like-minded" is not only unnecessary, it's an interference.

When we sort people into Who's With Me and Who's Not, we end up focusing on thought, narrowing perception, and missing other, non-thought forms of communion.

Because whatever it is we really are, (whether it's named consciousness or God or universe or spirit or soul)…

Maybe it doesn’t need one human’s words to match another human’s words.

Maybe it doesn't need agreement.

Maybe it doesn’t need words, thoughts or points of view at all.

Besides, whatever that is, this What-We-Really-Are thing, where does it end, and the What-The-Other-Guy-Really-Is thing, begin?

If we cant find that divider, it could be because there isn’t one.

In which case, we’re already connected and there’s nothing separating us.

No matter what thought says, no matter whether there's agreement, no matter whether thoughts are about consciousness or beer or camels.

Which would mean we’re equally as connected to a NASCAR fan or an "other-side" political supporter or a religious zealot as we are to an Enlightened Sage.

Perhaps that’s shocking.

But only if we’re focused on thoughts.

Move attention away from the selective sorting into agree-disagree groupings, and we begin to see that “alone and disconnected” isn’t possible.

Regardless of our viewpoints on consciousness, enlightenment, and those Others.

Which is pretty sweet.

And connected.

And anything but alone.

"Yes, it can be shocking and even scary to realise that the reality we invested in all these apparent things and people does not belong to the objects and people. It belongs to the Consciousness ‘aspect’ of experience.

Fear gives way to humour, happiness, and love when we realize our mistake and begin to see that our own being pervades all seeming things. We cease to take our self or others for entities and cease considering the world to be made of dead inert matter. 'I' and all others or objects are one Being."

~Rupert Spira

"Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy."

~Thomas Merton

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY?

April 2, 2024

"Dear -----, I have watched Alan Watts, Eckhart Tolle and Mooji online. They speak about: there is no doer, no thinker, no knower, etc. What are they talking about? What does it all mean? Is everything spontaneous then? Every action isn't calculated or thought about? We are not really doing anything? I am not really doing this as I type out this question? I feel very confused. Thanks for your time. I look forward to your reply."

~Anonymous

"Everything happens for a reason. Except when it doesn't. But even then you can, in hindsight, fabricate a reason that will satisfy your belief system."

~Anonymous

So there I am- dancing away in the middle of a dance competition. Dancing dancing dancing.

And then suddenly coughing coughing coughing.

Why? Well because I mis-swallowed my own spit of course.

And since no one else was hacking up a lung all over their wish-to-escape dance partners,

it had to be a personal problem.

It's a Commandment: *Thou shalt swallow your spit properly. If you don't, that's on you*.

So of course after my mis-swallow, God, the universe, karma, Zeus, Yama - all sitting in some celestial pub making up rules for humans and meting out consequences – stepped in to provide the coughing punishment I deserved.

Because it seems humans have the power and control to cause bad things, aka *be at fault,*

but then somehow don't have the power and control to sidestep the results.

This is what we call "responsibility."

We're in charge of success or failure, money in the bank, getting a hole in one, painting a masterpiece, writing brilliantly, the temperature of the planet, and whether polar bears go extinct.

We're in charge of how we feel and what we think and whether we judge or compare or dislike. We're even in charge of how "we make" other people feel and think too.

All happenings placed squarely on the me. *I* did this.

That's how it works. I don't make the rules.

Cause and effect is completely built-in to the sense of self. Everything is about the Me and what it did and what it caused and what it deserves.

We'll even *make up* dots to connect if we have to, as long as we're the center point and cause of what happens.

Although we might notice how heavy all that fault, blame, responsibility, free will and doership are.

It's heavy heavy stuff.

Which it really needs to be. Since heaviness keeps us from noticing how wispy the self actually is.

The substantialness of the self is enhanced by heaviness.

Sigh. Maybe we could consider a different point of view.

Maybe we could consider- what if it's actually *not* us doing anything? What if absolutely all happenings are-

literally and completely-

random?

Money, health, spit, failure, personality, feelings.

Random, random, random.

What if there are no connecting dots from experience A to result B? What if experience is new every second and has no prior cause or reason?

Of course no one has to believe any of this. It's just a point of view and a "what if." No harm in trying it on.

And it just may be worth playing with. Because believing we're in charge of what happens feels awful.

And *random,* though granted, might be almost completely incomprehensible to humans, feels *way* better. Much lighter. Much more spacious.

We might discover a whole different sense of self, if we play with peeling off faux responsibility and cause-effect from that self's aching back.

We might discover that, just like there is no self, there are also no gods watching, judging, and meting out punishment. Perhaps nothing is out there lining up our failures, just waiting to give us the smackdown when we misbehave.

It could even be that we've been free of the ties of good-girl and boy all along, and we just haven't noticed, so bent over have we been, carrying responsibility.

"Random" just may be the key to the unanchored, free-floating self.

Something so many lovely Mind-Tickler readers are looking for.

And who knows- that might be worth swallowing.

"The hand lifts, but you say 'I lift'. The eyes see but you say, 'I see'. The nose smells, but you say, 'I smell'. All this is the power of the Self and yet you say, 'I did it'. That power belongs to God. Who is this ego arrogating 'I'? He has no place in the palace, but once admitted inside, he overrules the king and affirms his own existence. But after some enquiry, this ego's existence is easily disproved. Then the king once again affirms, 'I am Reality.' There is one thing about this condition – there is bliss. If there are two, then there is pain. Where there is One, there is bliss."

~Siddharameshwar Maharaja

"Do you think that I know what I'm doing?
That for one breath or half-breath I belong to myself?
As much as a pen knows what it's writing,
or the ball can guess where it's going next."

~Rumi

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

April 9, 2024

"Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder 'Why why why?'
Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand."

~Kurt Vonnegut

If there's any desire for the exalted state of enlightenment, the urge to understand and *get It* is strong.

So you want AHA!s and realizations and explanations and "Oh I see!"s. You want to know *why*. You want things to make sense.

Enter The Witness, Being Aware of Awareness, Going Inward, Big Self, Little Self, The Path, The Gate. Enter satsangs and gurus and unending questions and requests for explanations from said gurus.

Understanding will be yours. Whoo hooo!

Although, what exactly *does* this understanding? What transcends the self's usual focus on me-me-me in order to comprehend, see through, and be aware of…

Itself?

I mean, it's certainly not the self. That would make understanding dependent on a very unreliable source.

Especially since trying to transcend, trying get outside of the mind in order to comprehend the mind, would thus be using that very same mind to do it.

Which is a brilliantly looping, rigged, system.

After all, even the word “realized” contains the word “real.” The word makes real, a being, a subject, who realizes and is aware of awareness.

Which makes *awareness of awareness* a subjective experience. A subject, The Me, is aware of itself and therefore separate from the thing (The Me) it is aware of.

So you want comprehension of no-self and no separation and not-two, and you want to get outside yourself to see your self, and yet still…

Getting-Outside starts from the Right-Here.

Which isn’t outside.

Nothing can get outside itself.

Making Awareness as you understand it, actually just more you. The Witness is just more you.

Regardless of how spacious and big it "feels like."

Understanding reifies the self.

Perhaps you can see the flaw in this approach.

Luckily though, no matter what anyone thinks or feels like,

Consciousness is not in little ol’ you. You are in *it*.

You are OF it.

Making you *It,* itself.

The Divine, the vast, the incomprehensible.

You are that.

Which means, while you happily explain and converse and argue about what awareness is and how it works and how one can “access” it,

You are everything, every experience. Already.

Look at you, Being it.

You are joy and beauty and anger and tears and laughter and color and music and triggers and pain and addictions.

Because what is awareness, consciousness, the Divine, if not Everything?

Whether it's understood by humans or not.

And leaving no one, no Me, no locatable point of view, to understand.

So it may be a relief to know that you never will. You’ll never comprehend.

Whether you're certain you do, or not.

Despite all those fist-shaking assurances on social media,

Human understanding is not possible.

Although sure, you can keep trying. Why not?

After all, understanding is IN It too. Understanding is It too.

Though yes, grasping does get in the way of what you claim to want.

Still, you are even that, too.

So feel free to carry on trying to figure it all out…

And being aware…

Of being aware…

Of being aware…

Of being aw...

Aha! That's it!

Ahhh.

Got it.

"You are asking, 'Who am I?' and you are not going to get an answer, because the one who will get the answer is false. You may have an idea, a concept, and you will think you have found yourself, but it is only a concept; you can never see your Self."

~Nisargadatta

"There was a young man who said, 'Though
It seems that I know that I know,
What I WOULD like to see
Is the "I" that knows "me"
When I KNOW that I know that I know.'"

~Alan Watts

THOUGHT TARGET

April 16, 2024

"What tries to get rid of a thought is just another thought."

~Adyashanti

Mean. Repetitive. Non-stop.

Stop that! Do it right! That's bad! Look out! Don't you ever learn? Don't do that! Be normal! What are you DOing? Boy you suck at this! Try harder! Be good!

Ensnaring us in, well…. something.

They feel like they're coming at us. They feel like they're aiming for us.

Like bird-poop bombs.

Guess who's the target.

So unfriendly. So unfair and wrong.

Naturally, in order to be saved from this constant attack, we want different thoughts, changed thoughts, nicer, less stressful thoughts. And while we're asking, can we have please more space between them too?

Better yet, no thoughts at all.

Yeah that's what we want! No thoughts at all.

But no. We've got 'em. Or rather, they have us.

Because clearly we don't own them. Too many people have the same ones.

So they're community property.

Maybe if we can just figure out what we did to cause the constant barrage, we can stop the constant shirt-smearing. And we can figure out how to handle it when they land on us (*which is usually*), and how to meditate them away, or how to inquire for new and improved thoughts.

So of course we analyze them. *What's IN this poop?*

Because they feel like they happen *to* us.

Boom. We're placed. Anchored. Identified.

The center point.

The ones under all that poop.

There we are!

Thought locates the self.

Being the located, here-I-Am-the-victim-of-thoughts self, fending off all that attack, can make a person need a nap.

No wonder so many of us are pooped.

The thing is….

What if thoughts, whatever they are, are not happening *to* us?

What if they *are* us?

Which is different from being "identified" with them (whatever that means), or believing them, or determining if they're correct,

Or even witnessing them, which locates us, still, as the watcher.

But rather, *BE*ing thought.

As in it's literally, actually, what we *are*.

Each thought, constantly changing, not located anywhere, not landing anywhere.

Happening. To no one.

All us. All we. We are them.

Everywhere. Everything.

Well, then the target vanishes.

Then there's nothing to get free of. No enemy to dodge. No target to protect or save. Nothing to stop or fix.

Much less work. And much less Me to fuss over.

Which as it happens, is what so many Mind-Tickler readers have been looking for-

This lightening of the sense of self, this seeing the wispy transparency of the sense of Me.

Here it is.

Without having to beat thought into submission.

Which is lovely, since that beating hurts.

When instead we might discover that simply trying on, "What if I am this thought? And this one?"

Might, more easily,

Be far more

of a direct hit

On what we really are.

Bulls-eye.

"It's all thoughts, which are nothing."

~Robert Adams

BUT...

April 23, 2024

"Yeah but no."

~Little Britain

"There is no self. But what about me?"

~Seekers

This is one of those seemingly light Mind-Ticklers which discusses the not-grand, but perhaps may be helpful and practical anyway.

It's a subject that probably gets in the way of what you want all the time.

A subject you think you already know.

But you don't.

Because maybe you're doing some form of inquiry but feel stuck on the hard stuff. Or maybe you're doing your best to "sit with feelings" but it's uncomfortable. Or maybe you're seeking an understanding of nonduality or consciousness and reality or yourself, but there's still more to get.

Or maybe you understand no-self but there's still a sense that *HELLOOO,* you're *RIGHT HERE*.

Very likely, my exploring friend, you are run by BUTs. Those three letters own you.

Because they take you, not where *you* want to go, but where *they* want to go.

Redirecting, rerouting, sending you off on another direction.

The little rascals change the subject.

As if thought says, (belligerently, triumphantly,) *"Ok I'll play along. But soon as I can I'm going back to the way I do things. We're wasting our time here."*

Which you probably know.

I mean it's common knowledge that *Yes, but* really means no. It's common knowledge that, pretending to add to the yes, *BUT* actually negates it.

*BUT*s essentially cancel the first part of their sentences.

"Is it true? No, but it feels like it."

Um, okay.

So why is this so common that everyone does it, even while knowing better?

Because the mind's entire game is to hide the self's nonexistence.

It's a one trick pony, but it employs many strategies.

BUT is an easy, everybody-says-it-so-no-one-notices ploy.

Which is why there's a special kind of irony in exploring oneness-of-being in some way, while at the same time inserting *BUT* into every inquiry, every self examination, every meditation, every statement of feeling (except bad ones.)

Because *BUT* always equals two. Two viewpoints, two answers, two feelings, two thoughts.

So much for oneness.

Meanwhile, which is the answer? Is it true or isn't it? Is the feeling welcome or isn't it? Do you experience no-self or don't you?

There's only one answer. If truth exists, there's only one of it.

So it might be fun next time, to play with what an answer or understanding feels like, without tacking on a *BUT* (or any of its little friends: *however, and, except, although, yet,* and *still)*

What would understanding feel like without a *BUT*?

Now to be clear, this isn't about trying to stop *BUT* from coming.

That's not going to work anyway. Stopping thought is not in your power.

Instead, if you want to play with a different experience, tell the *BUT* to wait. Tell it to come back later.

Any feels-urgent-but-is-it *BUT* can wait 10 little minutes.

And then you get to have the fun of seeing if it even bothers to return at all, once there's no longer a need to divert.

You get to see what it feels like to actually notice, attend to, and honor the first part of your answer...

The part said before the *BUT* came along to eliminate it.

"I can't find the self." PERIOD.

"This feels better." PERIOD.

"This feeling is welcome." PERIOD.

I mean, who knows, maybe the usually strong sense of self, with all its many opinions and feelings,

might even begin to feel a little less solid, a little less tangible, a little less viable,

when *BUT* isn't given free reign to poop all over your answers and the first part of sentences.

Now of course you may be thinking, "But this is stupid. Asking the *BUT* to wait is just too simple."

And maybe you're right.

But in that case it's no big deal to try it, and there's not much to lose, is there.

Or, it could turn out that maybe this is a very simple way to play with something more than book-learning, something more than intellectualized concepts which never do feel real for you.

Because till now, the *BUT*s haven't let them.

But there's only one way out find out.

"The fool will laugh at you, but the wise man will understand."

~Linji Yixuan

"It may seem we're on a path, but we are always back where we started."

~Rupert Spira

"I know you’re tired but come, this is the way."

~Rumi

ONE EGO DEATH, PLEASE

April 30, 2024

"When he was dying, J. Krishnamurti's doctor stayed in his room with him for longer than usual. When the doctor came out, everyone wanted to know what they talked about, suspecting some great revelation had been passed on. The doctor said, 'We were having a wonderful time discussing Clint Eastwood movies. We are both Clint Eastwood fans.'"

~Tom Thompson

Over the years The Mind-Tickler has written about many grand consciousness-raising topics.

Under guise of seeming lightness, we have considered awareness, enlightenment, vastness, self, no-self, thought, mind, suffering, free will, choice, and happiness. We've examined the nature of reality, and whether there even is such a thing.

We have quoted philosophers, mathematicians, neuroscientists, and physicists.

If that isn't grand and serious business, I don't know what is.

Mixed in with all of that importance have been many Mind-Ticklers covering the not-in-the-least grand. Perhaps even the downright ridiculous.

As in, y'know, the human.

The What-the-Hells of everyday life. The money and health worries, mistakes, failures, lack of motivations, shames, politics. The social media block buttons, laundry and housekeeping dust bunnies.

Yep. Not grand.

Why does The Mind-Tickler bother with such untranscendent nonsense? Why even talk about the mundane tribulations of the false self?

I mean, it's not real anyway.

Shouldn't we stick to loftier discussions where enlightenment might happen, and human messes no longer apply?

Let's face it, lots of good folks reading The Mind-Tickler hope that some right words will catapult them into the vastness of enlightenment, thereby making human ego - the convoluted, angry, scared, sad, regret-filled, human ego-

go *poof*.

Of course, it's ego itself which supposedly wants to make itself go *poof*.

Claiming it really really wants… its own extinction.

While managing not to notice that said *poof* has happened to exactly no one through all of known history.

Ramana was still Ramana. Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, Krishnamurti- transcended their personhood. Not one was a poofed, unrecognizable, egoless person.

Well, that's inconvenient.

Still, lots of folks hope to make what they understand is a fictitious character, die or disappear anyway.

Ego-death seems desirable.

Though, what would be left if they were successful and ego did finally *poof* into nothingness?

Well, that would be nothing. *Nothing* is what would be left.

Because the person, the illusion- this is where humans live.

Love, joy, bliss, tears, fury, terror– everything is experienced via the character.

Without the ego as fulcrum through which experience happens, there's nothing.

Don't take my word for it. Try experiencing anything, hearing anything, feeling anything, knowing enlightenment is happening, without the illusion of you.

The illusion of you is where everything known is experienced.

That includes enlightenment. That includes awareness of awareness.

In fact, "attaining enlightenment" specifically requires us to *NOT* go *poof*.

Because existence requires… existence.

Not non-existence.

Luckily for us ego-types though, the character is where the fun is. The character is what experiences the scary movies, the roller coasters, the tear-filled novellas, ballgames, artistry, chocolate, sex.

Self is where the juice is.

It may be a dream, a stage, a play. It may be a story.

But it's fascinating. And we adore story.

In fact, remove story and what's left is heavy, dull, dry, uninteresting. What's left is weighty.

Which is the exact opposite of the blissful transcendence supposedly desired by poof-seekers.

So yes, The Mind-Tickler sometimes turns to everyday tribulations, dramas and pains of the non-existent self.

Why not? It's fun. And as it happens, all of that is included in consciousness too.

So while till now, disappearing the ego somehow may have seemed like an answer,

since it hasn't worked so far, maybe we can try something different.

Maybe we can consider enjoying the hell out of ego's weird and wacky experiences, pleasant or not- rather than continually attempting to escape this human business.

Because Krishnamurti liked Clint Eastwood movies and luxury and cigarettes. Alan Watts liked drugs. Ramana liked his cow and his mountain and his rice cooked just so.

None of them transcended personality.

Escaping ego is not an option.

So we may as well make friends with it.

As is.

And ironically that ego, and the mundane, and the disapproved-of, and the everyday trivialities-

just might be where freedom has lived all along,

Anyway.

Besides, this ego-bound life business will be over soon enough.

No sense rushing that.

"I am so appreciative that the insights that come my way do not turn me into an emotionless thing with no personality. I enjoy all the facets of being a so-called 'person' even though I know it is just a play of the elements. The ups and downs. The crazy intellectual mind games. The spiritual types, so careful with their catch phrases and jargon. I would trade all the spiritual nonsense for two french hens any day of the week… Enjoy. Life is the great teacher."

~Gilbert Schultz

Questioner: "When people see any personality quirk, they feel there cannot be liberation, as the person doesn't appear to be perfect."

Tony Parsons: "Yes, its gorgeous stuff isn't it? The mind will find any way it can to get out of this. (Laughter)"

ADDICTED

May 7, 2024

"If I knew I was consciousness I wouldn't want wine."

~Client

"I hear in many places that when the truth of my own nature is seen, there's no 'me' left – therefore no 'me' to quit smoking!"

~Anonymous

"All who make idols are nothing."

~Isaiah 44:9

For a while, I worked with someone who specialized in helping people with addictions. This person's own drug addiction had fallen away, and from the outside, it appeared they had beaten cravings in general, enough to attempt to help others do the same.

Meanwhile they were stealth-cruising public parks for anonymous sex at every opportunity.

Turns out their addiction lived on. It had just moved from drugs to sex.

They weren't alone though. Pretty much every human individual is addicted to something, and often to many somethings.

And like my former colleague, it may not be as obvious as pills or vodka; it can just as easily be sex, shopping, big feelings like fear or anger, or the hunt for enlightenment.

Most folks have their favorite theory about cause.

There's the "filling a void" theory, the "reaction to past trauma" theory, the "avoiding feelings" theory, the "neurological problem or chemical imbalance" theory. Or it's lack of presence, not mindful enough.

These theories can be combined, or mixed and matched.

Most don't call them theories though. Usually folks are absolutely certain about their favorite explanation, often citing sources of well-credentialed other absolutely certain people.

You'd think with all that total certainty about addiction, that it ought to be easily stopped, fixed, and a thing of the past.

But no. Most addictions do not actually end.

That's despite all the favorite cures or solutions too. Despite all the therapy, inquiry, ayahuasca, treatment centers, 12 steps, meditation, and the sitting with feelings. And let's not forget enlightenment, which is supposed to make flawed behaviors such as addiction simply vanish. *(For those hopeful true believers, let's be clear this is not true. On the contrary, addictions often get stronger. See Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta, Watts, Mooji.)*

So isn't it funny that in our minds, we call compulsion *a pleasure, a treat, reward, relief.*

While at the same time trying very hard to *stop* that so-called reward.

Bargaining with “Just one glass.” Having the inevitable internal discussion about moderation rather than complete elimination. Landing eventually on all or nothing, and not being trusted to keep chips in the house.

One thing we’re sure of. We’re responsible. There’s a whole lot of personal choice involved.

Sure, *bad* choice, but still.

This behavior must stop and it’s up to us to stop it.

Hmm. The self is mighty powerful, no? Considering it can’t prevent itself from opening a beer?

Yet look at us. We are The Doer!

Doing bad.

Bad us.

Misery follows. Guilt, failure, hopelessness, shame.

That’s some treat.

It turns out that somewhere along the way, “I deserve this pleasure” turns into, “This is all I deserve, this self hatred, regret, and heaviness which follows the indulgence.”

Because despite what the mind tells us in the throws of a craving, addiction is not a reward.

It is a punishment.

For believing we are a person. A not-productive-enough person, a not-kind person, a failure-in-life-and-love person, a selfish or angry person.

A bad person.

Which is what persons are.

The self is inherently inadequate. This self is not ok.

Y'know, according to the self.

That's why almost everyone experiences addiction.

It confirms the sense of self, while giving mind a project.

Which is why quitting just may not be up to us.

Because despite what it says, no matter how convincingly, mind/thought/ego has no desire to change a thing.

And personal responsibility may not exist.

And weird as this may sound when we've all had lifetimes of indoctrination about our empowerment and ownership of consequences,

it could be that accepting our complete lack or power with regard to addiction,

sidesteps the mind trying to solve its own problems.

Because the mind's only way is to punish.

Not stop.

Meanwhile, taking the solutions out of our obviously powerless hands can lighten the sense of being a person at all.

Which, it turns out, is what so many seekers actually seek.

And may even provide the feeling, the happiness and peace, that we were hoping to find in the ice cream, the bottle, the new furniture, to begin with.

Powerlessness can be mighty sweet.

Non-personhood can be light.

We might even get high on it.

And who knows? That just might be

the ultimate treat.

"Admitted we were powerless."

~The Twelve Steps, Step #1

"God was full of Wine last night, so full of wine that He let a great secret slip.
He said: There is no man on earth who needs a pardon from Me-
For there is really no such thing, no such thing as sin!
That Beloved has gone completely wild . He has poured Himself into me!
I am blissful and drunk and overflowing.
Dear world, draw life from my sweet body,
Dear wayfaring souls, come drink your fill of liquid rubies,
For God has made my heart
An Eternal Fountain!"

~Hafiz

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

May 14, 2024

"No decision, no fear."

~Byron Katie

"The choices that will be made will be made, and you've no choice about that."

~Jeff Foster

Years ago during the height of the last recession, it suddenly came to me to sell the sun-drenched condo I'd been living in in California for over 12 years.

I knew instantly it was the right thing to do.

I shared the idea with my then boyfriend/co-owner of that beautiful place, expecting his immediate, very reasonable 'no.' But somehow selling seemed right to him too.

We set to work. The place sold quickly, in a bidding war, even in the heart of recession.

There was nothing but calm.

Fast forward to a few weeks later. Calm? Please.

There was crying, there was mourning, there was rethinking, regretting, revisiting.

There was redeciding.

Over and over and over and over.

Maybe I shouldn't sell. Can I get my realtor deposit back? Have I made a mistake? What am I walking away from? What am I walking TO? Have I made a mess of everything, ruined my life, screwed my future (and my boyfriend's,) forever?

For months afterwards.

Um, Judy? *Hellooo*. *Knocking on head.*

Idea came. Realtor was chosen, condo was prepped, cleaned, painted, listed, and sold.

And here was Judy, like a hamster, re-running over it all, again and again.

As if my now-panicked, now depressed review of the pros and cons mattered one whit.

As if the decision had not been already made.

Now, all these years later, I'm watching various folks struggle similarly with decisions.

Decisions that have also already been made and acted on.

Take a new job? (which has already been started.) Stay with the spouse? (while not moving out for years). Keep the sick dog going? (while doing 3x daily pillings and bi-weekly trips to the vet).

There are pro-cons lists and visions of an unsalvageably messed-up future and questions about competence and confidence and worth.

While the body and life live out the already-finished decisions.

Such an odd thing that only humans do.

I mean, my cat gets up and walks into another room. She doesn't make the change and then think, "Hmmm, did I make a mistake coming in here?"

And how funny that we don't notice that ideas come *TO* us.

Standing in the shower, or walking the dog, or drifting off to sleep, we are handed a gift, a surprise, an unasked-for idea.

We don't have to earn it or be deserving. Pop! There it is, coming into our heads.

Falling into our laps. Quietly. From "out of the blue." From somewhere else.

From somewhere not driven or seen or known by us.

And then we say *I* made a decision. *I* did this.

Graspy humans taking ownership of something that happened to us, was given to us.

And then we get busy rudely turning the gift over and over in our hands, evaluating its merits, as if it was our work and our doing and our idea and we are the arbiters of whether it's good or bad.

Like we would have any idea.

Apparently we think our participation is required. Apparently we think it's necessary to control something that came on its own and is not really ours to control.

Unsurprisingly, this theft of ownership of decisions feels awful.

Hello self-blame, regret, fault and desperation to psychically figure out what the future will bring.

And we do all these mental gymnastics despite the fact that the decision itself has already come with calm. It's the ownership and rethinking and psychic guessing that brings the anxiety and worry.

Later. Afterwards.

It seems things run smoother and sweeter without our useless input.

But nevermind that. Let's climb on the wheel and keep redeciding.

So the next time there's a decision needed, maybe we might ask, and wait, and listen, and

just follow the quiet, peaceful, popped-in suggestion.

Trusting the calm feeling to be the guide, when the inevitable doubt starts spinning.

Without questioning, without reviewing, without cross-examining and grilling the idea to death.

Kind of like trusting The Force. Rather than the Jedi.

I mean, can you imagine a Jedi saying, "Gee I don't know if The Force is right. I better figure this out myself."

Humans are irrelevant to the process of "deciding".

The Force does all the work.

It's easier to trust it.

Since it's going to do its thing regardless.

That would save humans a whole lot of terrified spinning.

Allowing access to the calm we wanted to attain in the first place by making the "right' decisions.

I mean, it's possible it feels better to not second-guess The Force.

And it’s also possible that Jedis have a lot more fun

and a lot bigger worlds

than hamsters.

"Since one can't decide to think
Nor can one decide
Thoughts' contents,
Why does one
Claim their ownership?
Is every sound Wu Hsin's because
He can hear them?"

~Wu Hsin

"I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction, and if not how shall
I correct it?
Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,
can I do better?
Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows
can do it and I am, well,
hopeless.
Am I going to get rheumatism,
lockjaw, dementia?
Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.
And gave it up. And took my old body
and went out into the morning,
and sang."

~Mary Oliver (edited)

ENLIGHTENMENT VIA PAIN

May 21, 2024

"Pleasure puts you to sleep and pain wakes you up. If you do not want to suffer, don't go to sleep."

~Nisargadatta

"Some can slow down the breath enough that there is oxygen deprivation, the brain then secrets natural opiates, creating a euphoric sensation. This is where people seem to feel they are 'close' to God or in oneness. Basically, they are temporarily pain-free."

~Jacqueline Wood

Man, we hate physical pain, don't we? What a misery.

In fact, for most folks, pain is the very definition of what is meant by "suffering."

I mean, let's face it, when the body hurts, there's no question there's a Me and a whole bunch of *No Thank You*.

So it seems only logical that we would try to eliminate pain or at least get it to some manageable level where it can be dismissed and ignored.

Yet avoiding pain is not the only option. Over centuries there have been countless Eastern monks, American Indians, and various religious

visionaries who *intentionally* brought on torment and set about to experience hurt in a very big way.

On purpose.

Yikes. What for? Why did they do this to themselves?

Well, to transcend self. To attain their idea of enlightenment.

Y'know, through physical torture.

Amazingly, over vastly different centuries, vastly different cultural groups in vastly different places in the world, have all discovered that when the body feels absolutely awful and the mind is occupied with dealing with that, the self/consciousness/spirit/ or whatever can fly free.

Which is why some Buddhists, ancient Chinese, Japanese, Hindus, Tibetans, American Sioux, Islamic, and even Catholic sects, intentionally *sought out* pain.

As a way to escape the body.

Via the body.

For these folks, physical misery was not just allowed, but actually *necessary,* in order to enable transcendence.

Meanwhile here in our modern day, our attention is strictly given to ways to *stop* the pain experience. There's ibuprofen and mindfulness and hypnosis and anti-inflammatory diets and opioids, weed, and alcohol, all in desperate hopes of not noticing any pain, ever.

And yet a lot of lovely Mind-Tickler readers are striving earnestly and with dedication in hopes of attaining some glimmer of enlightenment.

So, when it comes to pain, what if you could know that the distress so strenuously being avoided might be a direct way to transcendence?

Would you want it gone then?

If you knew it could take hurt you *don't* want, in order to get what you *do* want, what might happen to the experience of that pain?

Of course I'm not proposing that anyone rush out to induce agony like the American Indians. And of course I'm not saying any of this is easy. Anyone in pain can certainly be forgiven for just saying, "Screw this. Pass the morphine, Doc, and hurry."

But if you have any inclination to deal with pain in a different-than-usual way, if/when it does come to call,

Maybe it can be seen as an opportunity rather than a torture.

Because it could just be that what you've been aching for has been here all along, living right there in the screams and pains you've been so strenuously and unquestioningly trying to make vanish.

Who knows? That shift in viewpoint might change the whole experience.

And pain may turn out to be just

what helps you

see the light.

"During the dark hours I felt my sick
heart expand and beat more furiously,
and I no longer made any distinction
between pleasure and pain, but one
was similar to the other; both hurt and
both were precious. Whether my inner
life went well or badly, my discovered
strength stood peacefully outside
looking on and knew that light and
dark were closely related and that

sorrow and peace were rhythm, part
and spirit of the same great music."

~Hermann Hesse

"The stars say
'Tell us again about goosebumps.
Tell us again about pain.'"

~Andrea Gibson,
partial, from the poem, "Tincture"

BEING NO THING

May 28, 2024

"To know is to be.
Being nothing, I am all.
Everything is me."

~Nisargadatta

"Don't go spouting out an answer, just be the answer. Be It."

~Adyashanti

"The only way to find it is to be it."

~Alan Watts

"Verb: words that show an action (sing) or state of being (exist)"

~Merriam Webster

Here at Mind-Tickler headquarters we've talk a lot about no-self.

11 times since 2016 actually, discussing the self we're not. Much less often about what we *are*.

So today we'll try to balance that just a bit.

Here I am watching my cat clean herself in the window.

Cat, over there. Me, owner and seer of said cat, over here.

I'm definitely not the kitty; she's something other than me. After all, 4 sentences up I call her "my" cat, and one can't be both owner and also the object owned.

Plus, I see her. So I'm not the cat- I'm what's looking at her.

That makes 2 things, me and cat.

And now I begin to notice I'm watching me watch kitty. I'm aware of me being aware of her.

Awareness (thing) looking back at me (thing) from outside (thing).

Wait, how many things is that now?

Judy, cat, outside, watcher, awareness.

Naturally there are plenty more things too- such as consciousness, enlightenment, body, thought, mind, ego, personality, self, feeling.

Things. Objects. Nouns.

Lots of them.

Language has formed the world into nouns since before we were two, forcing us to think in terms of distinct and separate things.

The main building block of mind and understanding and thought is words. And words favor nouns.

So it is very difficult- almost impossible- to see the world any way other than in terms of self, others, and awareness as things.

Because language insists.

"With what am I aware of my experience?" --Anonymous

Can you see that this question as worded makes finding an answer unlikely? "With what" makes awareness a thing. "My experience," creates an owner, and also makes experience a thing owned.

This is partly why so many seekers never come to an actual lived understanding, settling instead for intellectual parroting.

Perhaps, if we really want to get this no-self business, or to see and think differently,

We might consider verbing.

Instead of focusing on, "What sees it?" (2 nouns,)

Or instead of trying to figure out if we're awareness, or the thing that's aware of awareness,

We could instead play with *BEING*.

Being experience rather than experiencing being.

Being experience rather than experience-er.

Being everything.

Literally.

BEing the cat. *BEing*, very literally, both eyeballs and the colors landing on them. *Being* every sound. *Being* every thought. *Being* every sensation,

feeling, and sense.

Fluid. Uncentered. Changing one millisecond after the other.

Of course there's no guidebook for doing this, no method, no rule. And it's certainly not going to come naturally.

Language won't let it.

So this is entirely just for fun. None of it is serious or important.

We can notice though, that we're either verbing or we're not.

Because if we're verbing, then we're everything.

And *everything* makes for no exceptions.

No "outside of me" ownership. And no owner at all.

In fact, no thing at all.

Not even one.

And then it might be fun to see - what happens to the precious and feels-so-real self exactly, when it's not a thing?

That seemingly strong sense of a *Me* might just dissipate, dissolving into the everything it is.

Ok fine. Yeah yeah. Why bother?

Of course there's absolutely no reason or need. Ever.

It's just that nouning hurts.

Verbing cannot.

Because it involves no thing.

So there’s no thing to lose.

No thing to gain.

And no thing

to be

any thing more

than everything.

"Only words and conventions
can isolate us from the entirely
undefinable something
which is everything."

~Alan Watts

"The observer spends a lifetime
In conflict with the observed.
This is resolved when
The observer is also the observed and
The two dissolve into the observing."

~Wu Hsin

"Make me nothing and from nothing, make me everything."

~Rumi

DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!

June 4, 2024

"The separate self is 'the resistance to what is'. This resistance takes two forms: 1) I want such-and-such to take place in order to be happy, or 2) I don't want what is present and need it to disappear in order to be happy."

~Rupert Spira

"Follow the simple directions."

~Byron Katie

I used to take the words, *Don't tell me what to do,* very seriously.

As in, butt out. I knew what was best for me.

Did I though?

LOL

Fast forward to today, where I see a few of my friends, as well as some people around the world, get all worked up over that same idea.

Governments, doctors, teachers, stores, flight attendants, friends, family, are all telling them what to do.

By God, it’s an outrage.

As if people giving orders and expecting you to follow them, is something new.

I mean, ever tried not raising your seat-back to its upright position on a descending flight? Yeah good luck with that.

Right or wrong, you have to live with your side’s political win or loss, vaccine or no vaccine, proper socializing rules, restrictions of all kinds, and let’s not forget, all those other fools who do things differently.

You don’t like it.

You think that matters.

Despite unending evidence to the contrary.

After all, there have been rules- liked or not- since Neanderthals shared caves.

There have been rules since preschool about having to wear pants, not hitting other kids, peeing in the right place, doing homework, eating one’s vegetables, going to bed, not talking back.

Life in general has been all about doing what one is told.

As a grown up now, it's just more of the same.

Yet the inability to make existence bend to one’s particular will makes for a lot of outrage.

As if existence itself is supposed to be run by each individual’s personal preferences.

As opposed by the other way around.

Eight billion people having the ”right” to have things their way.

That couldn't be a problem, right?

And hey, some of these people might even be into nonduality, and oneness, and no-self.

Well, at least until that no-self is told to do something it doesn't like.

Then, there's most definitely a self, and there are most definitely others, and if those others are too stupid to want or know the same thing you do, and seem to also think they have the right to what *they* want? Well, screw them.

This is an odd kind of freedom.

Because let's face it, this has never been a live or let live world. This is never been a, "*Go ahead honey, you just do things your way,"* kind of place.

So when you think your personal freedoms and your liked-happenings are guaranteed, or owed, you are thinking a little crazy.

In fact, the more you experience yourself as an independent doer, decider, master and knower of what should happen- with the right to have things your way,

the more despairing, or more likely, angry, you will be.

Petulant, obsessed, irrationally raging.

The intensity of those feelings betrays how off such thinking actually is.

Because no individual has ever had rights of any kind.

Not even the right to be alive. I mean, when existence is done with you, *BOOM*- Done.

Existence doesn't care what any human wants.

Existence is about the whole, oneness, the big picture. Existence is about the many, the all, the everything.

So life does what *IT* wants, and happenings which are not to your liking occur to absolutely everyone.

Constantly. Consistently.

Because the self is thought. And thought is nothing.

The self is nothing.

That individual self which feels so very real and so very important with its likes and dislikes,

it's smoke and mirrors.

And the preferences of smoke are nothing.

Smoke has no rights, and no need of rights.

Whatever it wants is irrelevant.

Which is why, for any individual, acceptance of *WHAT IS* ,

rather than foot-stomping tantrum,

might possibly be easier.

Maybe even bringing you closer to that feeling of bliss you like.

Calmer. More peaceful. Definitely less crazy.

And as an added bonus, you get to see what happens to that habitual, strong, sense of self,

when you stop pretending it has power and rights it has never had, or that it’s something more real or solid than it is.

Or that it's somehow *owed* what it wants.

You get the surprise of seeing what actions happen when you're not the center of all things.

Which is a very different kind of freedom.

Freedom from self-story. Freedom from self-importance. Freedom from self-delusion.

A freedom perhaps far more valuable,

than any non-existent preference

of a non-existent self

to demand

non-existent

rights.

"Freedom does not mean getting to do whatever one wishes. Nor does freedom have to do with 'free will', which is a fantasy. Freedom arises with the understanding that in each moment what is, is, and cannot be different, including whatever 'myself' sees, feels, thinks, or does. In light of that, one may come clean and admit that the 'myself' who chooses is a fiction, a story I have learned to tell myself. In that admission one may find freedom — not the freedom to 'choose', but the freedom to be."

~Robert Saltzman

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BRAIN

June 11, 2024

"Only a human brain can become amazed at its own amazement."

~Michael Markham

"I used to think the brain was the most important organ in the body,
until I realized what was telling me that."

~Emo Phillips

It watches you, you know.

It watches with awareness – awareness of the mind, the ego, the self with all its stories, convictions, and histories. It watches that self with peace and gentle acceptance. Not to mention, bliss.

What are we talking about?

Well, the right hemisphere of the human brain of course. (You thought I meant something else?)

The right side of the brain is where presence, happiness, a sense of unlimited vastness, oneness, and non-individuality live.

"My right brain did not recognize the boundaries of my body. Usually you know where you begin and end. I felt as big as the universe! I was the

collective whole, connected to everyone and everything—I was completely fluid."

--Jill Bolte Taylor

The right brain is where the divine is experienced.

And turns out, it is quietly aware of what we think of as "ourselves".

"Why is the right hemisphere generally willing to bear silent witness to the errors and confabulations of the left? Could it be the right hemisphere is used to it? The non-speaking hemisphere has known the true state of affairs from a very tender age. The point of view from which you are consciously reading these words may not be the ONLY conscious point of view to be found in your brain. It is one thing to say you are unaware of a vast amount of activity in your brain. It is quite another to say that some of this activity is aware of itself and is watching your every move."

--Sam Harris

To seekers of enlightenment or "god consciousness", this might all sound vaguely familiar.

On the other hand, the left hemisphere of the human brain provides what is commonly called the "inner voice," along with language, memory and the ability to figure things out.

The left side manufactures, defends, and inserts into everywhere possible,

The individual self.

The left side houses the sense of self.

Not an *actual* self of course. There's no little person inside that brain. Just a *sense* of one.

Turns out, if the human mind lives anywhere, it lives in the left side of the brain.

Which is why certain placements of left-brain stroke can shut down the mean voice in the head and leave connection to God, love and bliss in its place, in a heartbeat.

"I do not see how a non-dual awakening can be anything other than a physiological change in the brain... Symbolic thought is mostly mediated by language, so it is easy to see how shutting down the language faculty by a stroke or by less drastic means could act as a mechanism for plunging the mind into non-dual awareness."

--Patrick Kenny, Phd

Now to be clear, this is not to say, "Oh yay, gimme a stroke!"

Not least because, in order to have such a grand experience, a stroke has to happen only in exactly-placed centers of the brain.

Otherwise it's just wordless anger and an inability to speak, function, drive, or button your pants.

Most serious left-brain damage leaves people desperately wishing, for the rest of their lives, for their old life back.

So no, I'm not advising it. Not recommended.

Luckily in healthy, undamaged brains, the two sides are connected and work in harmony all day every day, each doing their respective jobs.

"The notion of a separate organism is clearly an abstraction, as is also its boundary. Underlying all this is unbroken wholeness even though our civilization has developed in such a way as to strongly emphasize the separation into parts."

--David Bohm

So then what is your friendly Mind-Tickler suggesting by this discussion?

Are we saying that self-realization and enlightenment is simply brain stuff? Is consciousness only a brain function?

Considering all the evidence that trees and bacteria and other life forms are also conscious, though they don't have a brain we can point to, maybe we could ask different questions.

Because it may be not that consciousness lives in the brain, but rather, that consciousness, always everywhere unnoticed, *expresses* itself utilizing the hardware of the brain.

Much like vibrations coming through a theremin, or radio waves coming through a radio, need the hardware in order to be received and heard. Vibrations and waves apparently invisible and not there, until the instrument picks up and plays them.

So what if the enlightenment so many are chasing- the oneness, connection, seeing that the self is fiction, or the bliss and beauty of the vast divine- is in there, right now…

Just waiting for the instrument to play it?

Waiting for the left brain to stop its loud bullying and dominating verbal puffery just for a moment, in order to allow perception of something much quieter, much softer, but already present?

What if enlightenment is always here, and everyone - as long as we're not brain damaged and even if in certain ways we are- carries this availability?

An enlightenment which doesn't have to be accessed, or known, or attained, or kept permanently.

Because it's there already.

Right there in the right brain.

Always.

Just as so many teachers have said, in so many different ways, with the same message, for centuries.

Because if it is the brain which gives access to the divine,

then God is here.

And It

is us.

"No brain, no lotus."

~Judy

MAKE IT STAY

June 18, 2024

"If you try to capture running water in a bucket, you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket the water does not run. To "have" running water you must let go of it and let it run. The same is true of life."

~Alan Watts

"Already your mind's saying, "Yes, but come on ... what about the levels of enlightenment and what about my emotional blocks, and what about my chakras, they're not all fully open? What about my stillness – I'm not really still yet, and what about my ego? It's a bit reduced but it's still there."

~Tony Parsons

Client: *I am no longer seeking. I see that this is it. I just need your help seeing this from different angles so that my mind doesn't take me away from present reality again and pull me back into thinking.*

Most spiritually-inclined folks are pretty certain there's something to get. and then, once gotten, it has to be held onto.

A person can get there and then, can/should/must stay there.

Of course anyone can be forgiven for thinking any of that, especially since that's the message from so many teachers, memes, and opinionated online posts.

Interestingly though, there's a common experience many people describe when they have a "holy crap" spiritual-type event.

Quite often they describe a sense of sliding, a feeling of scrambling on vertical glass, of no gripper and also no grip.

For a moment it is clear that there's nothing to hold onto.

And then almost instantly, all these same folks want to do is *hold on* to that realization, that understanding.

Permanently. As in, forever.

They want to grip the ungrippable. They want to never let it go.

"Whoo hoo I got it! This is *it*! Now how do I keep it?"

Oh the pain of contradiction, dissatisfaction, and perpetual seeking inherent in this particular confusion.

Because asking any version of, "How do I stay here?" such as, *How do I keep thought from grabbing me again? Or, How do I keep my awareness of awareness? Or, How do I keep this bliss, this "not minding what happens" state?*

is a hopeless, failure-guaranteed goal.

First, because here on planet earth, nothing stays.

Weather changes minute by minute, rivers change direction, earth's axis and magnetic poles shift. Creatures are alive and then dead. Skin cells, hair, athletic ability, ideas, thoughts, moods, feelings- all come and go, all here then gone.

Why would we think some spiritual understanding, or a grasp of awareness, or some clarity of thought, is supposed to be the exception to that very clear Earth-rule?

How is it reasonable to think we're supposed to grasp something and keep it grasped forever?

Especially when our alive-human biology makes "holding onto" anything, even awareness, flat-out impossible.

Because it's the brain which enables us to experience anything, including awareness.

Humans can't do a single thing without the brain. That would be called "vegetative state."

Without the brain, we can't think, we can't feel, we can't meditate or zone out, we can't experience bliss or consciousness, and we can't "attain enlightenment".

It is not possible to be alive and transcend the brain.

Which means humans are always limited by its capabilities.

Which means the grand spiritual experience so many folks are chasing happens within the limits of the small piece of meat in our heads.

And as it happens, that meat, developed after many millions of years of evolution and species survival, does not do sameness. That meat looks for and requires difference, it requires change, it requires movement. *(There's tons and tons of science on this.)*

The brain sees a clear blue sky and instantly turns attention to the one cloud or the one bird or the one plane moving within all that clear empty space.

If nothing happens to be moving or appearing in the clear sky, then its attention simply wanders elsewhere.

The brain can't stay focused on emptiness for more than a second or two.

It literally cannot.

So good luck to any seeker trying to make nothingness, or sameness, or some dearly-loved experience, stay forever.

Besides, trying to regain or attain or hold onto that sliding nothingness actually makes the sense of self, the one to whom this is happening, *more* solid, not less. *More* something, not nothing.

So finally we might get that chance to experience that long-awaited, long-desired moment of nothingness and then boom, the mind promptly obliterates that emptiness by placing the *ME* squarely in the center of it.

Bye-bye, scrambling moment of not-there.

Of course, none of this is to say that the sense of *something* bigger, the sense of a consciousness which is always there, comes and goes.

Consciousness may indeed be here always. It may indeed be the one thing that stays.

And we may even sense this, or feel it, or somehow be absolutely convinced we know this.

And it may feel like consciousness is ever-present.

But "feels like" is not "knowing."

And let's get honest, *we do not know*. And never will.

Because true knowing also happens within the limited brain.

What we *do* know though, is that no one in human history has stayed in that highly-desired awareness of awareness, permanently.

No one. Not even Ramana. Or Krishnamurti, or Nisargadatta.

Seeing this can be a great relief.

Because chasing permanence of any kind is nothing but frustrating.

And wouldn't it be lovely to grasp or not grasp, get and then lose, hold and then let go,

Without rules or impossible demands for anything else.

Perhaps this is the true *This Is It*.

Perhaps this is something worth grasping,

and worth holding onto,

Even if only for a moment.

"We don't wake up forever. We wake up only now. People have these wonderful experiences of spiritual opening, and that's not it. As soon as they think, "I want this to last forever," they've moved in to a future and lost the reality. This is it, right now. It's that simple. Only this exists."

~Byron Katie

"Why would you want to keep the heart captive, like an unopened bottle of wine?"

~Hafiz

COMPARED TO OTHERS

June 25, 2024

"I can only think seriously of trying to live up to an ideal if I am split in two pieces. There must be a good 'I' who is going to improve the bad 'me.' 'I,' who has the best intentions, will go to work on wayward 'me,' and the tussle between the two will very much stress the difference between them. Consequently 'I' will feel more separate than ever, and so merely increase the lonely and cut-off feelings which make 'me' behave so badly."

~Alan Watts

I'm smarter than you.

Okay, maybe not younger, sweeter, or better looking than you, but definitely smarter.

Although... put me next to a 175 IQ genius, and maybe I'm not even that smart either.

Ah comparisons. Don't you love them?

Comparing is one of those no-no's we're never supposed to do. Everyone knows comparing is bad.

Yet everyone does it.

A lot.

Because no-no or not, we actually need comparison.

It's a key way the mind identifies the individual self.

Even though there's no unmoving self-stake in the ground where we're always the best, always the funniest, always the wisest, no matter what is happening or who else is there. Even if we arrive at the party feeling like hot stuff, all it takes is someone hotter to walk in and boom, down to the bottom of the pile we go.

The self is movable. It changes depending on context.

That thing is whimsical. Downright flimsy.

So naturally we try to make it more solid, more fixed.

Comparing shows us where we stand in the scheme of things. "I'm better than those fools, nowhere near as good as that genius. I'm not as good as that one, not as bad as that..."

Got it!

Located. Placed.

Here I am!

Comparison is the GPS of the self. It literally evaluates the landscape and tells us where we are.

The target moves though, so the map has to be continuously checked and re-checked.

There's no let-up. It can't be turned off.

Because without a location, where exactly are we?

Besides, most of the time we come up on the low end, the losing end, of the comparing scale. Since no matter how great we are, there's always someone cuter, more successful, more evolved.

Deficiency can be counted on.

I mean, we might be enlightened but we're no Ramana.

Which means, just for extra fun, a good helping of misery piles on, making it feel pretty crappy to be such a comparative loser.

That pain adds to the sense of solidity of the self.

So to increase the feeling-bad and the solidness, we keep our own lack and inadequacy front and center. "I'm the dumbest person here. Other people don't make these stupid errors."

We become laser-focused on all possible shortcomings and brush aside any compliments or accidental notions of superiority.

Which is why those rare positive self-evaluations, “Hey I did. something nice. I’m a good person!” quickly devolve into something like, “Hey don’t go thinking too much of yourself! Who do you think you are?”

(Always a good question. Who DO you think you are?)

Of course none of this is seen or admitted. We're not about to broadcast that we're a hologram.

No. Appearances must be kept up. We'll pretend we’re clever and confidant while standing next to a 17-year old tech start-up wizard. We'll pretend we like what we look like, or that life is actually as good as our carefully constructed presentations are made to appear on Insta.

Basically every one of us is putting lipstick on a pig and praying nobody realizes.

Especially not the pig.

So when everyone says, "Stop comparing..." Well, that's a lovely dream, but it can’t be done.

Enlightened or not, the self must be located. We have to at least pretend that we know where it is.

Otherwise how do we function in this world? How do we tie our shoes, feed our babies, know what to do next?

Luckily accepting the inevitability of self-location is much easier than trying to stop comparisons.

Because they can't be stopped. This is the game here.

Charades is as good a game as any.

May as well keep the lipstick handy and enjoy making up all the possible presentations.

So many options! So many colors!

Some on the lips. Some on the teeth.

All equally helpful for providing a Me to point to.

A solid Me. A Me who's *right here*.

A Me who, after carefully scanning the room,

Confirms it most definitely exists

and is present

And for sure is wearing the very best lipstick

"Things are as they are. Looking out into the universe at night, we make no comparisons between right and wrong stars, nor between well and badly arranged constellations."

~Alan Watts

"The real being, with no status, is always going in and out through the doors of your face."

~Zen Master Lin Chi

NEXT QUESTION

July 2, 2024

"I have opinions on everything in this world. You have your opinions, and I can also express opinions and judgments on everything. But my opinions and judgments are no more important than the opinions and judgments of your mother or that taxi driver there."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"Get two spiritual leaders in a room and you'll never see so much smoke being blown up each other's asses. That's how they levitate."

~Aaron Joy

The flattering stranger writes and asks me a spiritual-type question. It's a question about consciousness, awareness, truth, and of course how to get some of that for himself.

Y'know, the usual.

He's looking for understanding, freedom, guidance. He wants to "get it." He's looking to be shown the way. He's looking for magic in an email.

From me.

Aw mister, don't you know I have been disappointing people all my life?

I mean just ask my mother who, though dead, will no doubt drop down from the heavens just to let you know to about my lack of brag-worthy achievements, lack of adequate bank account, lack of necessary beauty, lack of proper personality.

But ok fine, here is this man turning to me as if I can give him something. And though I truly suck at being what people want me to be,

I'm nothing if not polite *(cough)*.

So I do my best to reply. I send a short couple of sentences, consisting mostly of questions turned back to the asker, hoping to intrigue him to ponder.

There! My best attempt at giving him what he wants.

He's probably not going to recognize it.

And sure enough, 2 weeks later there's the same guy with the same question, this time on social media asking someone far sager than I. Someone who, after replying with a somewhat repetitious 15 or 20 lonnngg paragraphs added to my couple of sentences, provides all the answer –and then some- that any inquirer could possibly ask for.

Surely now, Mr. Question-Guy is filled up with lots of satisfying truth and understanding.

Nope. Turns out question-man enjoys that kind of response very much. He reposts, adds multiple lengthy comments, revels in the windy word count, soaking up all those little letters.

And then... he asks a whole bunch more questions of Answer Sage.

Seems no matter how many posts, answers, satsangs, podcasts, meditations, there are always still more questions.

Perhaps because questions are a bottomless pit of never-get-there.

Perhaps because someone else's answers don't actually answer anything.

Perhaps because the sage's position is not the same as the asker's position.

Since that is literally impossible.

So then the question becomes, should anyone- Rupert, Adya, Grand-Windy-Sage, *anyone*- actually answer these queries? Ever?

After all, if what is wanted is experiential understanding, what good does some teacher's understanding do for the inquirer?

Words can not create experience, they can only describe it. That's not what is being sought by this kind of asking.

Could it be that depending on Teacher to tell how things are, how Teacher sees things, what happened to Teacher in the past to make that magic happen,

actually encourages any asker to be dissatisfied with his own answers?

If he even looks for them at all.

Because having all these resources and lengthy answers to every question might just make a person not even bother asking himself.

Could it be all this turning to sages ensures seekers *don't* find their way?

Hmmm.

Maybe if teachers really want to help, they might tell questioners they'll be chasing forever this way,

And then, just shut up.

So that there might be even a *moment* of silence for the asker to hear his own answers without all the bloviating noise.

That would be different.

But it’s not to be. Because this cuts right to the heart of most teachers’ income and follower base.

After all, if people don’t seek sages' wisdom and give them an opportunity to spew their views, what exactly do sages have to offer? Why would they keep talking?

Surprise! Turns out all those long-winded answers not only fill up askers with wind, *they fill up the teachers too*.

They get to be someone who knows something, someone who has something, someone who generously offers to others who don’t have what they have.

They get to be someone.

Which is just an exaltation of the ego.

Questions and answers validate *both* selves- asker and answerer.

Hmmm. Kind of the opposite of what people imagine teachers are doing.

Now this isn't to stop the questions from being asked. I realize it feels like they must be asked.

It's just that it's clear, most folks adore this idea of pretending to seek, while actually

intending never to find.

So though I will never be able to give the actual experience inquirers say they want,

and truly no one- no guru, no wise one, no enlightened sage- ever will either…

Still, when asked, I’m willing and happy to keep offering...

less.

Less pretending, less superiority, less words, less answers, less stringing-along, less…more.

Oh yes, there's plenty more where that less came from.

Everyone is welcome to ask for more of that.

Anytime.

And I also wish for all askers

to enjoy living

Without getting it.

Which is as rich and enlightened as anyone could ever get.

And who knows, might even

answer

every question.

"When you are deluded and full of doubt, even a thousand books of scripture are not enough. When you have realized understanding, even one word is too much."

~Fen-Yang

"If i'm an example then that's great. But I don't have to preach it. I dont have to march it. I don't have to carry signs. I just AM it."

~Dolly Parton

"When the student is truly ready, the teacher will disappear."

~Lao Tzu

BAD FEELINGS

July 9, 2024

"There is a sensation in you, and you say that you are depressed or unhappy or blissful, jealous, greedy, envious. This labeling brings into existence the one who is translating this sensation."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"The body is a safe refuge for the sense of 'me.' It is rarely discovered there."

~Rupert Spira

You wake with it in the morning. Or maybe it hits later in the day, or wakes you at night. If you succeed in making it out of bed, you lug it around, trying to force yourself to function.

Emotional pain. Depression, anxiety, panic. Sad. Heavy. Unbearable.

The mental loop runs, repeating the same blah blah blah word for word, all day, every day, over and over.

It's irresistible and can’t be ignored.

“Feel feel feel. Augh Augh Augh. Feels like this, feels like that. Don’t like don’t like don’t like don't like. Make it stop make it stop make it stop. Somebody save me!”

No saving comes.

Nothing works, there's no hope, you're obviously in trouble and beyond help or relief, you're a failure a loser broken bad piece of crap deserving no better. No one has it as bad as you.

Maybe you can try to hide how messed up you are from others. And maybe you can't.

Mind's attention constantly on the You. What you feel, what you don't want, what you can't handle, what you think caused it, what you think it means.

Y'know, about you.

Who are you without it? Not a clue.

Although you have dreams of what you'd be like without it- supposedly peaceful, content, feeling good.

All while not noticing that that feeling isn't actually there.

It's not in the body.

Yes, there's a sense of it. But *sense* is just another feeling.

Yes it feels like it's in the body, as you point to solar plexus, stomach, head.

But in that case it should show up on an X-ray, an MRI, a CAT scan, light or heat sensor, shouldn't it?

Like every other body-thing does.

And then a surgeon should be able to go in and blessedly-thank-you-lord, scoop that sucker out and remove it.

But no.

This runs-your-life thing which is so intense, so obvious that no one could possibly question its reality because *duh-*

turns out it's not actually findable.

Which makes it an illusion, an idea, a story, an intangible, unprovable concept- which isn't literally there.

I mean, here's you and everyone else absolutely knowing that *Of Course!* feeling is in the body and *Of Course!* the body is where it needs to be dealt with, sat with, transcended, converted, managed, controlled, listened to, honored, respected, felllllllllt, and interpreted.

Enabling a lifetime of trying to fix something that isn't where you're looking.

Trying to fix or feel something which is nothing.

And then wondering why you don't succeed.

Feelings aren't feelings. They're thoughts.

Perhaps this is why you want others to validate those feelings, going on and on and on to anyone who happens to stand still near you for more than a minute, endlessly describing how you *feel*.

Validate. As in, make valid. As in, not valid already, it needs to be *made* valid. By somebody. Anybody.

But nothing real needs to be validated. Your shoes don't need to be validated, the cat doesn't need to be validated. Only feelings and the story of who you are want validation.

Not that the mind has been willing to let you notice any of this. That would mess up its, *Of course I exist, look how much I hurt!* gig.

The sense of self far prefers to focus on solving the terrible problem of terrible feelings, than to notice that they, and it, don't actually exist anywhere.

Turns out you're not actually defending against feelings. You're defending against the nonexistence of self.

You're just using "feelings" to do that.

So ok fine, blah blah. Who cares? Real or not, it's called Pain and it's awful. Real or not, something needs to be done.

And since that sense that something must be done is very strong, and since you're going to keep trying to do something about it anyway, you may as well try something different.

For a change.

So here are a couple ways to play with that feeling you love to hate, whether it's real or illusory.

Just for fun. Not intended to be "The answer" or a miracle cure or even a cure at all.

Since nothing is sick and nothing needs healing.

1- Notice the timing, notice the WHEN.

Notice *when* your attention is called to a feeling. (The mind will say "It's all the time," but if you pay attention, you'll find that is not true.) When you notice, "Oh crap I feel terrible," ask yourself, *How am I using this situation to know who I am?*

And then answer the question.

Because does any feeling- any contraction, any heaviness- make a person bad, a failure, unlovable? It's just a sensation. Does it have the ability to make a person, at all?

2- Ask, "Why does it matter what I feel?"

Take, "I don't like it" off the table, because nothing in the universe, I mean nothing, cares what anybody likes. And take, "It's uncomfortable" off the

table too, because that's different wording for just another feeling.

And then notice there's a ton of supposed meaning about who you are- as a person- laid on top of the feeling. Meaning is a concept though, a mind-concoction. Take it off.

And then see what's left.

It could be that without all that dislike and meaning layered on top, intense feelings become remarkably... less-so. It could be they become just an interesting experience- a heaviness, a flutter, a dark color, a contraction.

Just like that.

3- Why does it matter if a feeling happens? What cares if a feeling happens on this earth?

Don't settle for "Me, I care." Point to that. If you point to the body, see if skin, bones, blood, nostrils, elbows, heart muscle, care about anything at all, let alone some unfindable emotion.

It could be there's nothing to point to.

So that the question, Why does it matter what I feel? might open surprising new doors, if you're willing.

Which, of course, you may not be.

After all, the devil you know might be preferable to finding out about one you don't.

And of course that's fine. Just painful.

On the other hand, once *don't like* and *meaning* and *importance* are peeled off from sensation,

a quick and effective noticing

of something other than self

might suddenly happen.

And who knows?

That might feel

Pretty darn good.

"We walk around all day in this virtual reality, physically experiencing what the mind is telling us. If we stop, see through it all, and give it up, what will become of us? It's scary. Everything in the end is a defense against nothingness."

~Adyashanti

"Let everything happen to you.
Beauty and terror.
Just keep going.
No feeling is final."

~Rainer Maria Rilke

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

July 16, 2024

"We realize with a jolt that what we perceive is never the world directly, but rather our brain's best guess at what that world is like, a kind of internal simulation of an external reality. Still, we bank on the fact that our simulation is a reasonably decent one."

~Amanda Gefter

"Without the projection of the mind, the world cannot exist."

~Jac O'Keeffe

"Reality is only a Rorschach ink blot."

~Alan Watts

"I know this is true because I directly experienced it," said the random guy on Facebook.

Ok! Can't argue with that, can we? I mean, he experienced it. So it must be true.

We'l just ignore if our own personal experience happens to clash with his personal experience.

Or more likely, we'll argue with him about whose is right. *(Hint- it's definitely ours.)*

Yes we love personal experience. Everything we think is real is based on it.

For most everyone, first-hand knowledge is the final arbiter of reality and Truth.

Even though by definition, "personal experience" means, specific to Me, with all my unique slants, perspectives, conclusions, information and thoughts.

Y'know, person-al.

There are the colors and shapes seen in *our* eyeballs, sounds heard in *our* ears, touch experienced in *our* fingertips, *our* skin receptors. There are emotions felt in *our* bodies, aided and interpreted by thoughts we also call ours.

Let's face it, we only know what's what when it comes through *our* filters.

Otherwise, we can't know anything.

At all.

Which means that all experience is always specific only to us.

Which means it has nothing to do with Objective Truth.

And when we presume that it does, we're basically saying, "My way is the way. What I encounter is all there is."

Which is only just a little arrogant.

Because this know-it-all-ness, based strictly on what *we* see, hear, think, and feel personally, is kind of breathtaking.

I mean here we are experiencing, and somehow we come to believe that these particular-to-us happenings prove something about the "real world," a supposedly fact-based, unbiased, and independent, real thing.

We're quite certain of this.

Even though, when we do perceive anything, those perceptions are still only our own eyes, ears, fingertips, experiencing.

Personal truth. Not objective truth.

Can you say "projection," boys and girls?

It's not like this is just sometimes, either. No, we're 100% projecting our personal experience at all times, non-stop.

And calling it, "reality."

So for those who enjoy being important or special- which is pretty much everyone - at least this is good news.

Because it means that we were right- we *are* the center of the universe; it is all just us projected out into everything. We are necessary. We matter.

Whooo hooo! We knew it!

This can also be good news for those who are interested in the idea of Enlightenment and No-Self, too.

Because when we begin to see that our Very Important Personal Experience is only a viewpoint, and that all of our, "Of course reality is real!" certainty can only ever be projection…

Our usually-strong sense of being an individual with a translatable experience may just begin to get wispy.

Because when we don't lug around all the limitation that comes with "objective reality," the sense of self may begin to feel less concrete.

Now of course I'm not saying that any of this is ever the least bit necessary. It's just that many lovely Mind-Tickler readers happen to be curious about this particular individual-not-individual, self-not-self, thing.

And as a doorway in, the consideration of what is real vs what is our biased, deceptively separate experience, can be very enlightening.

Though no amount of considering will ever reveal what is actually real.

Because we will never be able to get outside these perceiving machines.

So an undebatable, unalterable Truth which is not tainted by or based on personal experience- something outside the self-

is something we will never know.

Because it can't be known. Not by us little humans, anyway.

Which is fine. We don't need it.

Though that particular Don't-Know-and-Never-Will enables...

Oh I don't know.

Who knows?

We'll never know.

Hey where'd we go?

"The world presented to us by our perceptions is nothing like reality. Evolution drives truth to extinction. We've been shaped to have perceptions that keep us alive, so we have to take them seriously. If I see something that I think of as a snake, I don't pick it up. If I see a train, I don't step in front of it. I've evolved these symbols to keep me alive, so I have to take them seriously. But it's a logical flaw to think that if we have to take it seriously, we also have to take it literally."

~Donald Hoffman

"The world doesn't exist. It's all an illusion. It never did exist. It's all the reflection of a concept. There is No One and Nothing. It's literal. Are you ready to live without a world? Is that what you really want? Are you willing to lose the moon?"

~Byron Katie

NOOOO, NOT THE VOID!!

July 23, 2024

"A life filled up with being somebody is an empty existence."

~Wu Hsin

"Space is not empty. It is full, as opposed to a vacuum, and is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves."

~David Bohm

Nothingness. The supposed goal of every enlightenment seeker.

On the one hand, we're supposed to get ourselves into the void somehow. We need to see through self, empty the mind of thoughts, die to the ego, and experience the disappearance of everything we know and love.

OK! But... let's get real- that's kind of terrifying.

We hate that nothingness thing.

We far prefer *something*. We like filled up, not empty. We like to have something, we like to get something. We like extra, lots, plenty, more.

We are really not interested in not-enough, emptiness, void.

That all means lack.

No one wants that.

Perhaps this is partly why, at the same time we're supposedly trying to attain enlightenment, we're also spending countless hours looking for ways to be *more*- more complete, more enough, more calm, more blissful, more healthy, move valuable, worthy, substantial, present..

We'll think about how to get rid of thought, while conveniently filling empty space with more thought.

We may think about trying to be less, trying to be nothing, trying to "kill off" the Me- but actually, in our minds those enlightenment requirements equal deprivation, nullification, destruction.

No thank you.

Better to have fear, anger, sadness. Those are not fun but are at least better than emptiness and death.

We can fill up on intensity. Nothingness just leaves us hungry.

Meanwhile, here we are right now talking about emptiness like it's some thing.

But no.

And maybe that's part of what we've been failing to notice.

Because thoughts are nothing and we're used to those. The "inner world" is nothing and we're used to that. Feelings are empty and we're used to that.

Emptiness is actually just business as usual. We're already experiencing it all the time.

We're used to it.

We're already nothing.

And we're fine.

Stories of Me continue just fine.

Void or no void.

Besides, there's actually no need to be afraid of nothingness.

First of all, because it's nothing.

And second, because there can't be something without nothing to contain it. In fact there can't be anything without nothing.

Space contains the whole universe. That includes galaxies and black holes and egos and stories and personalities and crazy thoughts.

Empty space holds all the somethings. Including all that stuff we want more of. Including us.

Turns out we can live and survive only within the void.

So the existence we're so afraid of losing actually can't happen at all without emptiness.

The void means birth, existence, experience, everythingness.

Which is the opposite of death.

Nothingness is enormously, incomprehensibly, full rather than empty.

It's a fullness that can't be used up, harmed, disappeared, or killed off.

We can't die to that.

Talk about complete.

Talk about safe, full, and more than enough.

It's the ultimate in everythingness.

Including surrender, relief and gratitude.

Now that's spacious.

Fall on in.

"Since in reality all is void,
Whereon can the dust fall?"

~Hui Neng

"The empty cup
Has emptiness inside.
What happens to the emptiness
When the cup is smashed?"

~Wu Hsin

OUT OF THE BLUE

July 30, 2024

"There is no one who can resist what happens in this universe."

~Colette Kelso

Ready?

Fall in love. Right now.

Make yourself like a food you hate.

Make yourself adore the other political party.

Make yourself no longer feel those panic attacks and depressions. Yes you've probably tried to control them a few zillion times before, but surely this time will be the charm.

No?

Ok then, bring up ideas and solutions to whatever issues are happening, right now. Intentionally make creativity happen.

Or, try not having thoughts. (*For those lovely readers who think they don't have thoughts anymore, read this sentence again, slowly. Unless you're in a coma, in which case you get a pass.)*

Or, make enlightenment come. Don't dilly-dally; do it now, what are you waiting for?. I mean, it does seem to come when it pleases, or not at all, or even to those, maybe even especially to those, who have never done any meditation, inquiry or satsang.

But still, go for it.

Make life come, whether it wants to or not.

Or eat kale so that death doesn't come under any circumstances.

See just how in-charge you really are.

Oh, humans. Such adorably arrogant little things.

So certain that health won't be gained, jobs won't be scored, money won't come, enlightenment won't show up, unless *we* take charge and make it all happen.

So certain that consequences are a result of *our* actions.

So certain of our power.

Never mind the complete lack of evidence of said power.

Because when we pay attention to what actually happens vs. what we want to happen, it becomes pretty clear…

That everything comes out of the blue.

Preferences come out of the blue, solutions come out of the blue, love comes out of the blue, life and death come out of the blue.

Thank goodness.

Because if we're depending on ourselves and these minds to run things, well…

Look what we're counting on to make things right or make things better.

I mean what are the odds that the mind… the scared, mean, lying, doom-predicting mind… knows how or even has any desire to do that?

In fact, right about now it might even be alarmed or irritated by this particular Tickle-topic.

No worries though, mind; it's OK. You're OK. Plan and meditate and take action to your heart's content.

Why not?

After all, the idea to *Do Something!* comes from out of the blue too.

It's just that there's a lot of peace in seeing that there is a bigger-than-us Blue.

And that it's got ideas, it's got solutions, it's got, "Wow who could have seen THAT coming?"s.

Way more than we have.

Which means maybe we can take a break from the great big job of trying to run existence.

Who knows? We might discover that even on driver's-seat vacay, things still get done, feelings come and go, pounds come off. Anyway.

Though of course there's no problem if we do continue to try to impose our will and direction on existence at every turn.

After all, The Blue doesn't need us to step aside or yield power.

It does its thing whether we fight it or not.

Being the true boss and all.

I mean, we can't control the belief that we have control, either.

It's just that delusions of control actually control nothing.

While feeling simply awful.

So maybe we've had enough.

Or not.

Even that's not up to us.

And does or doesn't come, on its own time and direction,

From out of the blue.

"All practices are like
Painting a rose so that
It will smell better."

~Wu Hsin

MISSING SOMETHING

August 6, 2024

"All desire is a longing to come home."

~Tony Parsons

Raise your hand - who's feeling like something's missing?

How you doin' with love, friends, sex? How about purpose? Money, health, fun? Or enlightenment- you wouldn't turn that away, right? Or maybe just a little treat, a reward- a glass or three of wine, more books, bag of chips, full Oreo sleeve, another new pair of shoes?

I mean, when was the last time you felt 100% complete, satisfied, so totally whole that absolutely nothing, nothing, could possibly make it better?

Right.

It's tough being human.

Something is always missing.

And sometimes that sense of lack feels very strong, not ignorable. More often though, it's a vague, barely noticed, not definable, *sense*.

Whatever that is.

Something is Not. Quite. Right.

Always.

So naturally we try to pin it down. We call it loneliness and long for a partner to fix it. We assume we're damaged and turn to therapy or inquiry to fix it. We think we're not busy enough, successful enough, socially conscious enough, in which case productivity, money, or selfless acts of kindness will fix it.

And any or all of that might indeed quiet that sense of not-enoughness for a brief while. Usually though, very brief.

Because regardless of what all those love-yourself books in the positive-thinking section say,

To be human is to be incomplete. The self feels like it's not enough because it *isn't* enough.

Inherently.

Which makes sense, if only because, how could nothing ever be enough?

Turns out that the certainty that we're a separate distinct self feels like constant loss, missing out, denied access.

Which feels empty and disconnected.

Naturally we're going to want to fill up that emptiness with connection to somethingness.

Which will have to be sought elsewhere. Somewhere other than, or outside, the self. Because we don't have it.

So we look to another person, or thing, or idea. A loving family, a better body, enlightenment, money.

None of which ever truly quenches the thirst.

So it starts to be clear, though usually unacknowledged, that we *know* the separate self is an illusion. We feel it. We feel the lack in this Me, and in other Me's too, and in every Me-we-think-we-are.

And we hope that somewhere out there is our wholeness- our tribe, our true selves, our fullness. If only we can get the right magic to connect with it.

Yoooooo hoooooo.

That's all we ever want. We seek it constantly.

This seeking is hidden in everything we do. Longing for connection with vastness, craving reconnection to enormity, truth, the not-pretend.

We yearn to get back to the garden.

We think we have left the garden.

Because we apply the same idea of separateness and distinctness of the self, to the vast wholeness.

And then we come to think that everything is included in the vast *except* bad, inadequate, not-enough us.

Though that would make completeness *not* very complete, now, wouldn't it?

No, *completeness* leaves nothing out, including inadequate us. Our individuality is absorbed into it.

We are already included at the wholeness party.

Realized or not.

This is great news. Because it means the insufficient self does not have to be obliterated, or shifted, or killed off, or even transcended.

Which many seekers may find comforting. Especially in light of all those gurus saying the self has to die.

And also because it means that completeness, being already here, does not have to chased or attained.

Whew. We don't have to work so darned hard, and we get to have both- the sense of individual selfhood, and also the absolute completeness.

This leaves us with nothing to seek.

Because nothing is missing.

Unless maybe it’s the sense

of missing

something.

And that,

I'm pretty sure,

won't be missed,

and we might be just as happy to

exclude.

"You will never be satisfied until you find out that you are what you are seeking."

~Nisargadatta

"Learn to recognize the counterfeit coins that may buy you just a moment of pleasure,
But then drag you for days like a broken man behind a farting camel."

~Hafiz

DESERVED CONSEQUENCES

August 13, 2024

"What makes you think that you are living to do good unto others? To live to do good to others is a self-absorbed, self-centered activity of yours. You are not honest enough to admit that."

~UG Krishnamurti

"'Do you love me?' Alice asked.

'No, I don't love you!' replied the White Rabbit.

Alice frowned and clasped her hands together as she did whenever she felt hurt.

'See?' replied the White Rabbit. 'Now you're going to start asking yourself what makes you so imperfect and what did you do wrong so that I can't love you at least a little. You know, that's why I can't love you. You will not always be loved Alice, there will be days when others will be tired and bored with life, will have their heads in the clouds, and will hurt you. Because people are like that.'"

~Lewis Carroll

"If I'm not a good person, I don't deserve to live."

In sessions, people have actually said this to me.

Many many people believe it's important, necessary even, a downright requirement, to be a good and worthy-of-life person.

Though whatever "good" means can and does vary wildly.

Regardless, humans think we have to deserve good things, in order to get good things.

We have to *earn* money, success, admiration, love, peace, safety. Effort must be put in- meditating, inquiring, studying and seeking- in order to deserve enlightenment.

We have to be worthy.

Live right, and right things will happen. Live wrong, and get ready for a spanking.

Drink too much, yell at the boss, say the wrong thing at a party, make a mistake, hurt someone? Expect the consequences.

Badness begets suffering, lack, aloneness, cops waiting to mete out speeding tickets.

Which perhaps may be why, when hard things happen to babies or animals, the unfairness makes us ache.

Because of course they didn't deserve it.

Whereas we're eager for awful people to get their comeuppance, ideally immediately but if not, then at least someday in the future (hello, karma.)

For most of us there's a straight line between happening and consequence.

It's a line so necessary that if the gods don't step up, then we'll just sentence ourselves, thank you very much.

Playing both defendant and judge, penalizing with guilt, sadness, shame, humiliation, and regret.

Just to make sure we know whose fault it is. Just to make sure we get what's coming to us.

We call this "responsibility."

As in, we humans are responsible for what happens.

We're responsible for rewards and disciplinary actions, alike.

So if there's no lightning strike after cheating on a spouse or kicking a pet or just being plain old selfish and cruel,...

Or if someone lives right - volunteers, exercises, eats kale, saves polar bears- and still dies young or suffers...

Well that's just wrong.

Life is supposed to be a disciplining parent doling out appropriate judgments-

judgements conveniently based on who we are-

as a person.

Perhaps we can see the Me-ness, the Here I am-ness of that viewpoint? How ME-centered and placed that makes a person?

Apparently so important and vital are we humans to what life brings, that all events are in service to either pleasing, rewarding, teaching, or punishing...

Us.

And keeping the Me center stage.

The thing is though, whose job is it to make outcomes good? Who's in charge of consequence? What causes consequences?

What evaluates, what judges, what determines, what punishes?

Where is the evaluator?

Could it be nothing actually cares how we behave? Could it be nothing contains any point, purpose, compensation, or lesson?

Could it be nothing owes us a happy life?

Perhaps right about now, “Buts” are chiming in to say, “But get rid of consequence and we’ll unleash the inner monsters to run wildly and horribly amok.”

As if the only thing that keeps humans from being vile evil beasts is the threat of punishment and lack of reward.

Conveniently not noticing what might be left if happenings turn out to be actually random and not tied to our behavior.

Because remove cause-effect, remove rewards and spankings based on how well we behave, and

We can only end up with, “This is it”.

Lived.

Every experience valued, equally.

Without fault (ours,) blame (ours,) responsibility (ours.)

Without guilt, shame, fear.

Allowing us to experience events without self importance.

Perhaps even without self, at all.

Which could turn out to be one hell of a reward

Earned just for being alive.

And therefore,

well deserved.

"Everything happens for a reason. except when it doesn't. But even then you can, in hindsight, fabricate a reason that will satisfy your belief system."

~Anonymous

"Truth is not a reward for good behavior, nor a prize for passing some test. It cannot be brought about. It is the primary, the unborn, the ancient source of all that is. You are eligible because you are. You need not merit truth. It is your own. Stand still, be quiet."

~Nisargadatta

EVERYDAY LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

August 20, 2024

"How much 'ego' do you need? Just enough so that you don't step in front of a bus."

~Shunryo Suzuki

"If you didn't have an ego and you were hungry, you would pick up food but not know whose mouth to put it into."

~@KAPSV9, Twitter user

If you've been following The Mind-Tickler for a while, you know that we approach the traditional bigger-picture *isms* like consciousness and awareness and enlightenment by entering through the back-door of everyday life.

The hurts, shames, guilts, worries about not enough money or time, self-improvement schemes, lack of proper housekeeping, anger at family or phone company or traffic, etc etc etc. That's what is found in these Ticklers.

You know, all the lowly miserable life-stuff most of us Do Not Want.

Why does the Mind-Tickler enter through the everyday instead of talking only about grand things like awareness, you may be asking with fascination? 😉

Well, firstly, because whether it is or isn't true that there is no self, or that this life is a dream or illusion, or that there is or isn't Choice, there is little value in babbling on about any of that ad nauseam, as it seems so many spiritual folks are wont to do.

And second, because the reason most people have any interest in enlightenment, awareness or consciousness to begin with, is to help their daily life feel better. They want to find a way to experience feeling OK no matter what difficult situations happen. They want to not miss out. They want to feel safe, to love, be loved, live better.

All of which happens in the everyday.

And we can only explore reality and consciousness, figure out who we are, have the bolt of lightening, from there.

The human "part" of us, the illusion, the dream character, is what knows and experiences any thing. From right here in the everyday.

So we can't do without it.

And yet, so many seekers pooh-pooh the ordinariness of daily life. They want to overcome, see through, transcend. Only big, grand, whole, blissful expansiveness will do.

You know. You've seen it. "That rage or terror I'm feeling isn't happening to Me, because there is no me." Or, "Relax- there's no you paying the bills."

Daily experience is considered in-the-way ego, an obstacle standing between the seeker and the sought.

Somehow folks don't notice that there *is* no enlightenment without the simultaneous dream experience of the everyday self.

After all, without it, there's no way to *know* they've achieved the oneness they seek, that they've "gotten it."

"Oh I feel bliss." "Oh look I see there's no me." "Oh look, my partner's behavior is no longer upsetting."

Notice how any of this is known. Notice what knows this.

Checking the self's observations and experiences is the only way to know *anything*.

Because the everyday is where anything exists at all.

Even if it actually doesn't exist. *Especially* if it actually doesn't exist.

We may be consciousness and not the body, we may be the screen and not the content on it. But that content, that story, is what gives consciousness something to be consciousness *OF*.

So wholeness includes the nasty neighbor and the cruel illness and delusion and ego and all the persons with all our weird little quirks and preferences.

The everyday is an integral part of the whole and can not be brushed away, disregarded, or discounted.

There is nothing to be enlightened without the self.

Which perhaps is why so many teachers say, "Nothing changes" with realization.

Political views continue, upsets with disagreement or criticism continue, addictions or compulsions continue. No matter how aware of awareness we may be, the trigger-happy, incomplete, not-enough, fruitcake self is still here, long after we see that none of that is what we are.

Maybe it lightens. Maybe it doesn't. Still the sense of Me remains the only vehicle through which we know and experience everything.

This can not stop just by seeing that we are everything.

And either/or- either unseeing self or enlightened non-self- is not how things work.

Both and All is the way consciousness rolls.

So there's no need to threaten to jump in front of a bus to prove the reality or unreality of the self, or to angrily wonder, if we don't exist, then whose arthritis this is. There's no need to do away with thoughts and wacky actions and unpleasant triggers of the sense we've come to know as Me.

There's no need to get awareness or enlightenment or awakening right. Because it's already right and already included.

We are the bus, we are the arthritis, we are the hated feelings and the everyday stress and the horrifying suffering. We are the expansivenses and the bliss and the love.

We are Me and also not-me, self and also not-self.

We get to have it all. We get to be it all.

The everyday *is* the divine, living right there in the ordinary.

Which is just what the daily appearance of life,

that often unwanted and disliked backdoor,

may show us,

as it opens to something much much larger

than the door itself.

"I am ... the divine expression exactly as I am, right here, right now. You are the divine expression exactly as you are, right here, right now. It is the divine expression, exactly as it is, right here, right now. Nothing, absolutely nothing, needs to be added or taken away. Nothing is more valid or sacred than anything else. No conditions need to be fulfilled. The infinite is not somewhere else waiting for us to become worthy…. There is no need to wait for moments of transformation, to look for the non-doer, permanent bliss, an egoless state, or a still mind.

I don't even have to wait for grace to descend, for I am, you are, it is already the abiding grace."

~Tony Parsons

"The creature who says
'me' and 'mine'
need not bend down in shame---
along with lakes and mountains
the ego is created
and divine."

~Leonard Cohen

LACK OF MOTIVATION

August 27, 2024

"He who thinks he is the doer is also the sufferer."

~Ramana Maharshi

"As the mind sees things are getting done, it concludes that there must be a someone who does them, otherwise doing would not occur. But the vastness has never waited for the mind to recognize that there is no doer for doing to occur."

~Suzanne Segal

I work with a lot of people who struggle to get motivated.

Apparently there's a whole lot of stuff not getting done out there.

There are taxes overdue, books not written, new businesses not launching. There's de-cluttering not happening, exercise not happening, homework not done.

Leaving the house for chores is a big deal for some. And forget about phone calls- so much stalling instead of calling.

Pretty much everyone stalls about something.

We call this "Lack of Motivation."

As if it's missing. And as if motivation can be had, scored, grabbed, in quantity.

At will. Our will.

Like getting fistfuls of Halloween candy. We just have to reach out and grab.

Because we're supposed to earn the candy. We're supposed to do the hard work before we're entitled to the rewards. We're supposed to deserve good stuff.

And we don't. We just sit there, undeserving.

If only we were more like other people and did things ahead of schedule and worked harder. Then we'd be entitled to reap our rewards.

So we push. Comparing, harassing, and hating on ourselves with visions of crappy consequences and wasted opportunities.

Turning to self-help books, hypnosis, affirmations and organizing plans and structure for accomplishing.

Trying – unsuccessfully- to force ourselves to Do.

Which all starts to mean something about who we are as a person.

Lazy. Useless. Dirty. A waste of space and life. Not a contributing member of society. Not living up to potential. Broken, wrong, bad.

Sitting on the couch defines us.

And it's not a definition we like.

The thing is though, if we think about it, there's lots we want to do, lots we intend to do, lots we know would feel better once it got done.

We yearn to accomplish. We want to make things happen. We're eager to get going.

Isn't that motivation?

Huh.

Motivation isn't actually lacking. We've got plenty of it.

Yet we're sitting on the couch anyway.

Maybe motivation is not what instigates action. Maybe motivation is actually unable to force anyone to get up and at 'em.

In fact, for some, poke too much and there's more, not less, inclination to stay actionless. Just out of spite or fear.

How is it possible we haven't noticed that all the mean berating of ourselves, all the attempted inspiring with visions of an awful consequences, actually isn't motivating at all?

Turns out, constant finger-stabbing produces the opposite of what we're aiming for.

Turns out we don't have a clue how to control our behavior and productivity.

Turns out we struggle for control because we don't have any.

Doing is a happening that's out of our hands.

Which of course seems outrageous to the inner voice that says, "Well I have to be in control! Otherwise Nothing Will Get Done!"

But it's already not getting done. Even with the inner yelling at us.

That voice simply hasn't noticed that it has no power. And that it simply has no clue what to do.

We're not in charge of this.

No amount of motivation can give control we don't have.

So what would it feel like if we could see that we're a passenger, not the driver?

And that non-doing is not our doing?

What if none of this is our fault (despite what has been learned and ingrained?)

Well then, maybe then we can give ourselves a break.

Even if that seems opposite to what's called for.

Because let's face it, we don't know what's called for. We don't know how to make ourselves the boss of motivation and action.

Luckily though, and perhaps shockingly, relaxing a responsibility we don't really have anyway, can relax fear of lack and failure.

Which can relax constraints on action.

Getting ourselves out of the way just might allow action to be taken.

Things might just begin to get done.

Without us.

Allowing a Doer that does know how to get things done,

to do its job, unharassed.

What a relief.

And it could just be that

we deserve that gift.

Just for being alive.

"Who grows the oranges in the orange tree? Who grows the grass? Who takes care of the world and the earth? The same power that takes care of all the things on this planet."

~Robert Adams

"From man's perspective in this intricate game of love,
It is so easy to become confused and think you are the doer.
But from God's infinite certainty,
He always Knows that He is the only one
Who should ever be put on trial."

~"Hafez" / Daniel Ladinsky

PLAYING PRETEND

September 3, 2024

"There is no way you can use the word "reality" without quotation marks around it."

~Joseph Campbell

"It's a logical flaw to think that if we have to take it seriously, we also have to take it literally."

~Donald Hoffman

When I was a kid, coming from generations of musicians, a lot of my play life resembled those old Andy Rooney /Judy Garland movies: "Hey! Let's put on a show in the barn!" There was a lot of playacting, a lot of singing into hairbrushes, a lot of posturing in front of mirrors.

Grown up now, pretending continues, just not nearly so obviously.

To be clear, I'm not talking about lying or being inauthentic or showing off.

I'm talking about the very basic, completely inherent, everywhere-all-the-time impersonating that every single human does, every single day, 24/7.

Human lives are built on pretend.

Hoodwinking ourselves to believe obviously illusory stuff is partly why so many of us often feel like something isn't right, or something is missing, or we did the wrong thing, etc.

We sense the counterfeit and it doesn't sit right.

Don't believe me? Great, let's see.

We'll start small.

Let's talk about the literal review we do, like any critic after a Broadway show, evaluating our performance after any social situation or work event. "Ugh, did I say the wrong thing? Did I upset them? Did I do well, did I impress them, did I behave like a fool? What do the reviewers think of me?"

Let's notice we use the word "performance." for these situations.

The Me, star of every show. Singing into the hairbrush for the critics.

Or going a bit bigger now, how about everybody's favorite- feelings. What are they, anyway? They're not actually findable in the body. No surgeon has ever scooped out anxiety and said, "Ok, got it all, close ‘er up." Humiliation doesn't have a location, love isn't hanging out in a place inside, sadness is not in a closet somewhere. It just feels like they're there. They're not literally there.

Or continuing with anxiety, have you ever noticed it comes up after rough or scary situations? It happens later, when we're safe, and sitting in our favorite chair or lying in our own bed, scared about something that isn't happening.

As if we're practicing fear for later. Y'know, as in, rehearsing.

And how about love? We love pretending that it's about someone else. Until we notice it's a feeling of ours. And most often, love only happens if it has to do with us. "You make me feel so good. You make me feel like my best self. You're my best friend. You're there for me."

Love is also about The Me. We just pretend it's about someone else.

Or, still searching for anything that is not pretend or imagination, how about money? Money's a real, touchable thing, right?

Except that, once upon a time, humans arbitrarily choose one metal out of all the metals on earth to stand for money, to represent or symbolize money.

Even though a symbol isn't something real. It's an idea. A made-up, everybody-plays-along concept. "We shall all agree this gold hunk of metal stands for something important."

And then later, when lugging around metal got to be too much, everyone agreed to switch to paper, and now it's paper we pretend is valuable and important.

Don't even get me started on crypto.

Need more proof that we're living a pretend, illusory life?

How about time- past, present, future?

We live by the clock, another representation, although, of what, exactly? What is time?

And what a fun story- "the past." It's already-gone time. It was here, called "the present," and now it's gone and renamed "the past." But where it's gone to is a mystery. Its existence is proven by images- colors on screen or paper- or by memory, that notorious who-knows-what which has been shown repeatedly to be almost always inaccurate. Even the word "history" contains the word "story."

And of course there's the future- time yet to come. I wonder where it lives while it's waiting for its big moment on the stage. Does that moment ever come? Does the future ever arrive?

Or we could talk about furniture, trees, other people. Those must surely be real. But... they appear in our eyeballs, our ears, our fingertips. There's no proof they are outside The Me.

Oh dear. Could it be even others are still The Me, pretending to be something else?

Or look at the reality of self, personality, mind, thought, good, bad, right, wrong. Every bit of that is variable and dependent on context and situation and on what part of the planet we were born.

But nothing real varies based on location or context. If it's real, it's real no matter what.

Aw hell. Where's reality? Where's the not-illusion, the not-pretend?

Nowhere, man.

Illusion is where humans live. Playing pretend is what we do. We live in an agreed-on fantasy.

Even if we lived like Ramana in a cave, this would be the case.

So yay us! We get to act out stories and play pretend.

Like any little kid.

Musical numbers, sword fights and wars, tears, mistakes, laughter, love! Whoo hoo!

Yes we do know it's a game. We do know it's pretend.

We've agreed to play the part.

Because it's fun.

I mean, aren't we lucky?

This show we're putting on in the barn is wild.

"No thought you have ever had is true. No opinion you have ever held is right. Let them go. No idea you have of yourself, or of who or what you are, has ever corresponded to reality. Or ever will. Let them go....Let grace stop you."

~David Carse

THE DREAM LIFE

September 10, 2024

"Last night I had a flying dream, and it was so real I had a hard time remembering I couldn't fly when I woke up."

~Jed McKenna

"We all suspend disbelief all the time. Somewhere inside you know that your fast food lunch is more noxious than nutritious. You might as well spread lard on a pack of cigarettes and eat that, but you eat it anyway because, seriously, it's not just lunch that's so damn crazy, it's everything. Where do you draw the line?"

~Jed McKenna

"It's a dream, questioning itself."

~Darryl Bailey

CJ has a nightmare. She thinks it means something.

Something important.

She wants to know what the hidden message is. If only she can get a hold of it.

Because everyone knows dreams are personal. They mean something.

About the me.

Naturally.

And everyone knows that our lives and our obviously necessary understandings about the self can be transformed by decrypting the messages hidden within dreams.

We just need to figure out the secret code.

Much like Q-anon searching for signs of secret meaning in a sentence by putting together every fourth letter so as to make a new sentence. Or like reading tea leaves, or a jigsaw puzzle.

And so many symbols! Representations, illustrations, examples of…

well, something else.

Dream water symbolizes emotions that run deep. Or a threat to drown us. Or life, death, change, or rebirth.

Whichever.

Dream teeth symbolize sexual repression (because what else could teeth mean,) or the desire to be nurtured, or a big moment of transition. (*All interpretations shown, courtesy of Google)*

Pick one. Hell, pick ‘em all.

The thing is, what needs all these symbols? You'd think if mind has something to say, it would just say it rather than drizzle out all these obscure little hints. What's the big secret, the scavenger hunt, the hidden code?

What sends these special signs, and why can't it speak plainly and directly, if it's got something to point out? If it wants to communicate something, why not just say it?

Conveniently we never know if our guess, our reading of the tea leaves, is correct.

Since clearly we can make anything mean something.

We just need the proper decoder ring.

Oh well, at least the need for imposing order on haphazard chaos gets satisfied.

And yet... what makes us so absolutely positive that dreams are personal at all?

What has us so spellbound that no one considers that everyone might see the exact same things in dreams, or that billions worldwide may have all had similar dreams night after night, for thousands of years?

What makes them *ours?*

And what requires us to assign meaning about the self, of all things, to a dream?

And then we wake up and go on about our day.

Though once our eyes are open, it's not as if anything is different.

We commence doing the exact same assignment of meaning to random images and occurrences in the daytime, that we do when asleep at night.

We see a mental image, or a tree, or a body, and think- *that image happening in my personal eyeballs- it means something*.

"This action means I am unkind. This number means I have failed. That facial expression means I am unloved."

Arbitrarily attaching meanings and causes to random happenings.

We think it, see it, it feels real, so that means it is real.

Awake, asleep- same.

And just like in nighttime fabrications, in the daytime we're caught up, believing, and completely *in* it.

In the dream.

Though of course we don't realize.

Because we're part of the dream.

*In*the illusion, part of the mirage, composed of fantasy.

Not the one dreaming.

So we can't tell what's real.

Because dream characters can't do that.

Which is why all we can do, just for fun,

since we love codes and symbols,

is imagine playing with this same life if it was somehow possible to know, *This is a dream*.

Imagine playing with, *What if I'm a dream*. Imagine playing with, *What if this isn't real*.

Despite absolute certainty about bodies, chairs, meanings, motivations, or causes.

Despite absolute certainty that it can ever be known what's real or isn't,

from *inside* the dream.

Just playing with what-ifs.

Watching what that might bring.

Nothing real to lose.

And who knows, that might just be

absolutely

eye opening.

"This place is a dream.
Only a sleeper considers it real.
Then death comes like dawn,
and you wake up laughing
at what you thought was your grief."

~Rumi

"Suddenly, I awoke
Now, I wonder who I am
A man who dreamed he was a butterfly,
or a butterfly dreaming it is a man."

~Chuang Tzu

FIND YOUR SELF

September 17, 2024

"There is no self to take refuge in. The man who carries a parcel is anxious not to lose it -- he is parcel-conscious."

~Nisargadatta

"A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

~David Bohm

"Being is the consummate absence."

~Tony Parsons

There is no self. You do not exist.

Yep. Literally.

Whatttt?

Oh the arguments and disdain, mockery, anger. Damn that Buddha with his nonsensical no-self business. Damn Tony Parsons. And Nisargadatta. And both Krishnamurtis. Damn all those others too, including yours truly.

I mean, what in the actual hell are they talking about? You're right here, for crying out loud. *RIGHT HERE* (air-stabs finger in body's general direction.) Y'know, whose arthritis is this, and what if I step in front of a bus, and etc etc etc.

Are all those teacher-folks just stupid, or bald-faced liars? Or could you be missing something?

Or maybe there's no outrage, and only despair, as you've struggled for years trying hard to comprehend the incomprehensible.

Sitting cross-legged ruminating about I AM, depending on the Self to meditate on its own non-existence.

Either way it's gibberish. Try as you might, you don't see it.

Do you *need* to see it?

Of course not. Nothing needs that. Ever.

But you want to. And my inbox is once again full of the No-Self question.

Despite 8 previous Mind-Ticklers dealing with this subject head-on, and countless Ticklers indirectly addressing the nonexistent self.

So though we've written about this many times before, the subject is still of great interest, and apparently becoming an bi-annual Tickle.

So let's re-look at what might be standing in the way of seeing that you don't exist.

Mostly what gets in the way are basic certainties, certainties so completely assumed that it never occurs to you to question them.

Which is why we're about to get literal again.

Start by setting aside “seems likes” and “feels likes”. After all, you want to find what is *actually* real, not just what “feels” real. “Seems like” and “feels like” are metaphors. Metaphors aren’t reality; they’re similar-to’s and examples-of.

Yet notice how often you have to resort to them to deal with this baffling question.

OK. Let’s start with reality.

You are absolutely certain there is one.

And ideas like thoughts, ego and mind? Real. That bus you’ll step out in front of? Real. Arthritis? Death? Real and real. Duh and duh.

You’re certain.

And of course when it comes to a *me,* you’re absolutely certain of that too. There you are, in the mirror. There are the emotions and body aches, there are the thoughts, the socks, the chair, trees, other people.

You can see ‘em. You can feel ‘em.

Notice how much of that certainty about reality depends on “personal experience.”

Meaning, a person. Meaning, you.

What you think, what you feel, what you see and hear.

Things happen to this you. You are the one seeing and feeling.

Notice how finding the self requires a self to do so.

Also notice how much of your you-ness is body based.

Feelings, colors, sounds, senses- come from and point back to the body.

Take the body out of it and where does the self go?

Remove the body as the center of all things, and…

there is no center.

“But there’s still a sense of me.”

Where? Literally, specifically, where?

(Points towards body.) Ah. Are we back to the body- chest, head- to prove your existence?

And what animates this body, what gives life to it, what knows what it feels?

Is that physical?

And then notice all the geography words, the placement words, the location words.

“I’m right here.”

Body gives you a physical place.

We have found you. You are located.

As opposed to decentralized. As opposed to located nowhere.

As opposed to *BEING* the happenings themselves.

Because what if what you are is *experience*- every sensation, color, thought, rather than the experienc*ER*?

"*I am this feeling. I am this thought. And that one and that one. I am this sound, this color, this sensation.*"

Literally.

Then there is nothing to point to,

there’s no one to do the pointing, and

you are

everything you’d ever hoped you could be.

Everything.

Literally.

"What you are basically, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. And you’re ALL that, only you’re pretending you’re not."

~Alan Watts

"Listen: this world is the lunatic's sphere,
Don't always agree it's real,
Even with my feet upon it
And the postman knowing my door
My address is somewhere else."

~Hafiz

MINDING WHAT HAPPENS

September 24, 2024

"Here is my secret. I don't mind what happens. That is the essence of inner freedom. It is a timeless spiritual truth: release attachment to outcomes, deep inside yourself, you'll feel good no matter what."

~J. Krishnamurti

Sometime back, a man booked the free session I offered. He spoke of countless satsangs and retreats, daily meditations, trainings with well-known manifestors, LSD downed, frogs licked.

Now he's on Zoom with me.

What's he hoping to find?

Oh nothing. Life is great. Nothing bothers him, yknow, because he doesn't mind what happens. He gets "no self," he gets 'this is it,' he gets that it's all love.

So again, why bother talking with me?

No reason really.

Ah. Got it. Another spiritual seeker pretending to be more together, more calm, more evolved, more in control than he is. Unable to admit he hasn't found what he's looking for, and that all those life-consuming, money-consuming methods have not done the job.

Let's face it, everyone wants something, and usually lots of somethings. Everyone does mind what happens. Even Krishnamurti, despite that famous

quote above, minded very much what happened.

Just like everyone else.

Because no alive human escapes personhood. And being a person feels inherently... wrong.

Why? Because persons are images, illusions. Persons are not a real thing. Persons are imaginary.

Naturally, we may get huffy and argue and not admit this.

But we know, regardless. We can feel it.

This is partly why it's so very common for people to say things like, *I'm not good enough,* or *Something is missing,* or *No matter what I do, I feel I should be doing something else,* or *There's something wrong with me*.

Because humans sense the vast connectedness, we feel apart from it, and we want to, we yearn to, rejoin what we are.

Though of course the self will never be big enough for that.

So we feel *not enough* because we're *not* enough.

After all, images can never be enough. There's no way illusion can feel complete or satisfying.

Meanwhile, trying to come across, look like, seem like, we're calm and wise, or trying to match some spiritual myth of what life should be- well, that's a good way to *increase* - not decrease- that sense of not good enough and fraud.

Playacting that we're doing better than we are, presenting a together image, doesn't make us *actually* better or more together.

That just causes us to miss actual experience, in favor of fantasy.

It Is funny though, that we think playacting that we're doing great makes us look good. When actually it reveals how terrified we are to not be a polished perfect image.

Not to mention, even if we could pull off matching ourselves to some mythological standard of enlightened life, or even if we could somehow achieve not minding what happens,

are we so sure we even want that?

I mean, how ferociously dull would life be if there was only calm and peace, only joy and love? How long would it take till we wanted to feel more, wanted to have surprise, wanted to get riled up and enjoy some hot intensity?

Aiming for not minding what happens could easily turn into, *Be careful what you wish for.*

Thankfully existence, in all its infinite variety, is far more interesting than any crazy human fantasy of constant bliss and not minding things.

The way things are is hugely, vastly, incomprehensibly better, as is, than the tedious monotony we are certain would be preferable.

So if we really want to not-mind something, perhaps we could play with not minding being imperfect, not minding being not enough, not minding craving, not minding missing out, not minding being a fraud.

Then if there's anything left over, we could play with not minding that we do indeed mind what happens.

That's not-minding WHAT IS, rather than what isn't.

Which is a helluva lot easier than trying to create perfection out of mirage.

Especially when WHAT IS is already an astonishing miracle.

And who,

or what,

can mind that?

"You will never be satisfied until you find out that you are what you are seeking. If you want knowledge as an individual, you will not get it here."

~Nisargadatta

"You don't wake up by perfecting your dream character."

~Jed McKenna

SPIRITUAL IDOLS

October 1, 2024

"Do not make for yourself an idol."

~God

On non-dual sites and pages and spiritual groups everywhere, there's frequently wordy discussion about how we're nothing and there's no self and it's all illusion and all a dream.

And then in the next breath, the very same folks pounding their not-there fists in certitude, in dreamy vague, circular language, fervently extoll the virtues of their favorite Teacher.

There's a whole lotta worshipping going on in our spiritual worlds.

Downright idolatry, often.

There's feet kissing and eye-gazing and lining-up for intense hugs. There's smiley selfies taken with admired Teachers, complete with held-up autographed book, soon to become proud profile pictures.

There are literal altars- dedicated spaces carved out in tiny living spaces- with photos of some Revered One along with crystals, prayer candles, various talismans and statues of the Buddha.

There's even spiritual tourism to India, trekking to sit for a few minutes in a long-dead Wise One's cave.

As if the cave contains that Teacher's magic, which is apparently stuck in there and unable to be transmitted to some fluffier location such as, say,

Poughkeepsie.

But I digress.

It does all seem kind of confused, though.

If only because a picture of Ramana or Amma or Parmahansa XYZ is not what those sages are or ever were.

Pictures and altars and books are symbols- substitutes for something else- such as perhaps a longing for oneness.

Though oneness can't be experienced or recognized via symbols. Symbols are a step removed from the "real." That creates the appearance of two, not one.

Which every good non-dualist knows is the opposite of what is being sought.

Besides, if *we're* not-a-self, then these same Teachers are *also* not selves, also not there, also illusion.

So who or what is being worshipped, and by whom?

Not that any of this is the end of the world, or even a problem. I mean, jeez, let us adore happily away in peace. Seems harmless enough.

It's just that, when we idealize the Teacher- who is after all human just like us- we're pretty much missing the point their teachings are supposedly intended to pass along in the first place.

We're actually missing what we've been seeking all these years.

The story of the wise Other, the Not-Me, who has Something that we don't, pulls attention to the guru as the Provider of answers, connection and love, creates a sense of Them and Not-Them (aka us),

Solidifying the individual's already pervasive sense of lack, missing something, and needing improvement.

Idolization of teachers anchors the sense of self.

This is probably not what any acolyte wants or seeks.

Perhaps a bit less harmless though, is that teacher idealization causes us to miss that we already have, and already are, exactly what we're hoping to find in this Other.

Which means the sought is not in the Other.

It's not over there.

It's here. It's us.

We're the love for them and the feelings of missing something and the thoughts and the images and the selfies and the wisdom.

We're Them. We're It.

What we've been looking for in teachers, has been here, *as us,* all along.

So we're not lacking.

What we seek is already ours. No one else is needed to provide it.

Which is good.

Because there *is* no one else.

Buddha statue optional.

"A yearning arises,
To find oneness through another.
The search continues for an anchor."

~Anonymous

LIKED FEELINGS

October 8, 2024

"The coyote never has a bad day. Neither does the coyote have a good day. Hungry all day is not a bad day. Napping all day full of rabbit is not a good day. Because the coyote has no judgment. He does not evaluate. No "good for me, bad for me". People are the only ones who evaluate, and they never stop. Without judgment we would become like the coyote. Our capacity to enjoy would be shrunk along with our capacity to worry. How endlessly engaging and thrilling and glorious it is to let things matter when we have finally judged that they truly don't."

~Fred Knipe

"The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones."

~Rick Hanson

"We should not let likes and dislikes create a roadblock in our path. The likes make us run towards them and dislikes make us run away, but ultimately both take us away from our path."

~Gk Marballi on the Gita

You experience a feeling. An emotion.

Not just a feeling but a bad feeling.

Anxiety depression shame humiliation guilt regret confusion apathy boredom.

What makes it bad?

Well, you don't like it.

In this world, *Don't Like* equals bad. Whether you like what you feel or not is how you evaluate things.

--Love, happiness, compassion? Good day, good happenings, more please.

--Fear, sadness, shame? Bad day, bad happenings, please may it never happen again.

Life is completely owned by likes and dislikes.

As if, when you were born, existence made some kind of promise and in this life, you (along with 8 billion others) were owed good feelings and good happenings, liked feelings and liked happenings.

Only.

And as if, if that doesn't happen, it's somehow a problem.

So naturally, therefore, you are obsessed with how you feel.

I mean, *obsessed*.

Obsessed with checking and evaluating feelings. Obsessed with sorting them into categories of liked or disliked. Obsessed with trying very hard to experience only enjoyed ones.

Which is kind of funny really. Because while you're trying very hard to get feelings you want, you don't actually pay much attention to them when you

have them.

After all, nothing needs to be done with a good feeling. It's already good. There's nothing that needs doing there.

Bad reactions, on the other hand, now there's something for thought to work with.

Disliked feelings are a mind's dream.

What caused them, what they mean about you, what they mean about your past, what they mean about your future, what to do about them, how to stop them, how to fix them, how to transform them into bliss or happiness or contentment.

Trying meditation, therapy, medication, inquiry, listening to or "sitting with" disliked feelings so that they'll either go away forever, or shift into a more wanted experience.

All that thinking keeps mind busy and gives it a sense of existing at all.

Perhaps you can see the incentive to keep bad feelings, even while appearing and claiming to want them gone.

Perhaps you can see how focus on how the body feels, keeps thought's attention on you, the individual person stuck with bad luck and bad sensations.

Perhaps you can see how focus on emotions might keep a person from noticing the self's lack of reality.

The sense of who and what you are as a person is strengthened and reified by focus on what you feel, and whether you do or don't like it.

Feelings are the go-to resort of a mind threatened by its own nothingness.

Which ironically is the opposite of what so many enlightenment chasers are hoping to attain by seeking in the first place.

After all, a major reason people want enlightenment is for the promised liked feelings of continual bliss and equanimity.

Yet the very act of trying to get better feelings manages to solidify the sense of self, by occupying the mind so thoroughly.

So is it possible that, if it somehow became no longer necessary to only experience what you like,

there might be no need to continue seeking?

Could it be that, without a demand for only liked experiences, what would be left is, "Ok, this is it, as it is, may as well experience it?"

Could likes and dislikes turn into acceptance and interesting and good enough as is?

Perhaps this may be more enlightened than the version of awakening you've been seeking, with its exclusion of anything other than bliss and happiness.

Feelings come.

You like them. You don't like them.

So what.

Maybe it doesn't matter what you feel.

This is it.

Liked or not.

And wouldn't it be something,

or even nothing,

if it turned out that

you like that.

"This mechanism of likes and dislikes fragments the seamless totality of experience into 'me' and 'not me'. The objects that are caught in this web become the fabric of the self. In this way the belief “I am the body” is continually substantiated. It becomes dense, solid, sticky, layered.
The return from 'I am something' to 'I am everything' is the loosening of this fabric. The likes and dislikes become less tightly woven. The body returns to its original transparency. The mind is liberated from the tyranny of a separate self and the beauty of the world is restored."

~Rupert Spira

"Life is hard. Then you die. Then they throw dirt in your face. Then the worms eat you. Be grateful it happens in that order."

~David Gerrold

"Bliss is for children. Bliss is for tourists. Do you really think spiritual enlightenment is going to be like an endless orgasm? A permanent high? Heaven on earth? No more problems, no more worries, just sitting around HAPPY all the time? Doesn't that sound a little sleazy? Like all we're really doing here is trying to cop a great buzz? Bliss is just the heaven myth repackaged for a slightly hipper crowd; heaven on earth, heaven here and now. It's really too silly to talk about."

~Jed McKenna

NO THINKING!

October 15, 2024

"He was trying to think about what the world would be like without having thoughts about it."

~Michael Markham

"Is not thinking itself a notion in the mind?"

~Nisargadatta

Oh looky here, another lengthy social media discussion about thoughts.

As in, something needs to be done about them. As in, what *can* be done about them.

Every good spiritual seeker knows that thoughts are bad, n'kay?

We're at war with thinking. It's a powerful enemy we mustn't allow to live.

Apparently it's not enough that humans try to control absolutely everything in these lives- love, safety, health, feelings, money, time, productivity, desires, future.

No, we shall master thought too- ours and other people's. *(We don't want others thinking the wrong thoughts about us, do we?)*

Thinking does not get a pass.

Thought-management is required for enlightened self-less clear transcendence.

So ideally, the goal is to stop rumination completely. Eradication is highly preferred. Find a way to shut those babies down into complete mental silence.

Although try attaining realization, understanding, or "getting it," without thinking.

In fact, try living *in any way* without thoughts. Try raising kids, working, planning dinner, or listening to some teacher on you-tube, without thoughts.

We can't have one without all of it.

Ok fine, then stretch thoughts out so that there's lots more calm zoned-out empty space *in-between* thoughts.

Or, if that can't be done either, then for goodness' sake at least find ways to not believe them. And reroute thoughts so they go somewhere more to our liking.

Ok, let's take a moment and rethink this.

Because guess who it's up to, to make all that happen?

That would be us.

It's us who must wrestle thinking into line, whether through meditation or inquiry or psychedelics.

It's us who must control something that has been around for millennia, minding its own business, trying to force it to take us where we want to go, rather than where it wants.

Yep, it's all-powerful humans who will surely harness and put a leash on that.

Hmmm. Perhaps right about here, it's worth noticing what wants thought gone in the first place.

Because that would be... thought. What says thought is a problem? Thought.

Thought says, “I’m a very bad thing, I stand between you and contentment, so I need to make my very own self vanish forever.”

So... it wants to be rid of... itself? Um, OK.

And the thing is, what for? Just so that we can score some blissful feeling we happen to like?

Ok Ok, maybe all we need is just *different* thoughts. Nicer thoughts. More positive thoughts. Fewer of them. Thoughts that take us where *we* want to go.

‘Course, we are not in charge of any of that.

Not to mention that consciousness has no problem with any of this. After all, human thinking is *It* too.

That means it doesn’t matter if thoughts exist, if they’re something or nothing, if they say things we like or don’t, if they bring a feeling we like or don’t.

So maybe we can leave the management of thinking to whatever owns it, and let go of that misguided battle.

Maybe instead of trying to turn *What Is* into our limited version of “better” by willful control,

Maybe instead of adding extra thoughts about managing thinking to the pile of thoughts we are supposedly trying to reduce,

we can just make peace with it, as it is.

Because fighting for control of something much much bigger than we'll ever be, seems an odd way to seek peace, bliss, or enlightenment.

Whereas watching thinking come, watching it be liked or disliked, watching it float off and be replaced by the next, is easier. More inclusive. Less at-fault. Calmer. More peaceful.

And that just might turn out to be a whole lot closer to

what we wanted to get

by controlling thoughts

to begin with.

"You can't empty your mind of thoughts. You might as well try to empty the ocean of its water. But ...why would you even want to empty your mind, unless you're at war with reality?"

~Byron Katie

"A common misconception is
The belief that thinking is
The creation of thought.
Rather, it is
The reception of thought from
A source which has no name and
From a place that cannot be found.
Since one can't decide to think
Nor can one decide
Thoughts' contents,
Why does one
Claim their ownership?
Is every sound wu'hsin's because
He can hear them?"

~Wu Hsin

NOT THE BODY

October 22, 2024

"You are not the body.
You were not the body.
You will not remain the body."

~Ramana Maharshi

"Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in."

~Mario Puzo, The Godfather

So maybe you *get it* for a while.

Maybe you have a few blissed-out hours or days or weeks, see that you don't exist, experience that there is no self, become clear about the unreality of reality.

You may get a whiff or a lengthy immersion. You are all shiny with realization.

For however long, it's quite clear that you are not the body.

And then… what's this?

Depression, fear, panic, what's-the point, no motivation, why get out of bed, it's all nothing anyway.

An inexorable slide into… feelings.

Bad feelings, hard feelings, intense feelings. Dark night of the soul feelings. Life-crushing terrified feelings.

Quickly, *Not-the-body* disappears, replaced by *All-about-the-body.*

Because the feeling is too intense to be ignored.

So naturally you pay lots attention to it- describing, figuring out its meaning, analyzing, theorizing, connecting dots.

Ignoring is not even considered, what with everyone and everything telling you to *feel,* and sit with, and be with, and embody.

Which is ironic, since in the *Got it!* moments, you'd just experienced the exact opposite of embodiment.

And now here you are, sitting with those nasty feelings in the not-so-secret hope of tricking them into going away forever. (*Shhh, don't say that part out loud.)*

Meanwhile, notice the *timing* of this terrible darkness.

It shows up just as you see that you're not what you thought.

Just as it's seen that the body is irrelevant to what you are, feelings pull you right back to that body.

Right back to the feels-terrible self.

All while trying to figure out why it can't hold onto enlightenment.

Something is crying and curled up in a non-moving ball and pouting very hard about not being the star of the show anymore.

Attention routes back to wondering what's wrong with that self, and thinking death would be better.

Which is kind of funny, actually. I mean, here's thought saying you would be better off dead than be an illusion.

As in, death is ok, but not-existing isn't.

Alrighty then.

Meanwhile, you're hoping to get back to that enlightened state. But a no-body experience can't happen when you're all about the body and its feelings.

The body is required equipment to maintain, not dissipate, the sense of self.

Focus on how body feels keeps one from noticing self's lack of reality.

Feelings are the go-to resort of a mind threatened by its own nothingness.

Fine. Can you do anything about this?

Perhaps not.

Other than to notice what's left if you're not *The One Inside the Body* who is forced to feel terrible things.

Notice what's left if, rather than being you, the one feeling,

and you, the one located in and affiliated with that body,

you're literally feeling itself, instead.

Transitory, changing, uncentered, impermanent.

Unlocated.

Without body to house it, the sense of self has no place to land.

Without body to house it, there's no one to feel, and no one to place inside it.

Leaving no self-reference hiding inside feelings, whether liked or disliked.

Leaving focus on Being

rather than feeling.

And no one to have a preference

either way.

"The body does not exist except as a thought. There is one thought. Everything exists in relationship to that one thought. That thought is "me". Anything you experience based on thought is illusion."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"What is Self Realization?
A mere phrase.
People expect some miracle to happen,
something to drop from Heaven in a flash.
It's nothing of the sort.
Only the notion that you're the body,
that you're this or that, will go, and you remain as you are."

~Ramana Maharshi

CLEANING UP

October 29, 2024

"Neatness makes me feel like I have to be on my best behavior. Clutter is my natural habitat."

~Maggie Stiefvater

"In the uncertainty of everyday chaos is our own wisdom mind."

~Pema Chodron

In my (admittedly weird) work, there have always been a fair number of people who want to "work on" forcing themselves to be neater, cleaner, and tidier.

Bad housekeepers are perpetually coming out of the undusted woodwork. Dishes sit in sinks, unfolded laundry piles up, dust settles on tabletops.

Also apparently lacking is the motivation to correct this grievous behavior.

So things are out of place all over the place. *(Though is "out of place" even possible?)*

Still, it is amazing how many folks are stressed out, guilty and shamed by the inability to keep a clean house.

Perhaps because everyone knows that a sloppy home “reflects” something about us. Unkempt home reflects unkempt self. Messy home reflects messy mind.

As usual, it's about us.

That rat's nest we call a home is no exception.

Untidy means we're bad, lazy, and as usual, doing things wrong.

Never-mind that if we did clean, dust would settle right back on those counters the instant we stopped wiping them.

Because dust is the boss of dust.

Not us.

While we’re busily saying, “Disarray is wrong,” nature laughs.

Because nature adores a good mess. In fact nature *endorses* mess.

I mean, have you looked outside lately? There’s dirt out there!

There is zero evidence that existence wants our homes clean.

So this human problem may be less about whether things are tidy,

And more about the attempt to impose our will and order and control on everything including environment.

We want to be the boss of all things and situations, and we want the power to make ourselves make all this happen.

Which is why we either spend vast amounts of our limited time here on this planet cleaning what nature immediately makes messy again…

Or we fail.

Like the incompetent gods we are.

You can see why we hate chaos. And why we find tidiness calming.

Because all is right with the world when disorder is controlled and put in neat rows.

By us.

So yes, some folks run around stuffing things in closets and vacuuming and de-piling before company comes.

Hoping for a taste of ordered calm, and hoping that chaos won't expose them for the insignificant, easily-wiped-out, powerless flecks of dust they really are.

Now of course there's nothing wrong with any of this. I mean, if there's calm in a spotless home, then why not clean it, if we can make ourselves do that.

It's just that by trying to impose order, we really are fighting *what is*.

It's a never-ending job, always requiring more. *(Though somehow when it comes to enlightenment, we expect one and done. Just saying. But I (sort of) digress.)*

Meanwhile, there could actually be more calm to be found in the willingness to let disorder be what it is, instead of continually fighting a losing battle.

And instead of imposing some weird human notions of rightness, power and fastidiousness.

Though I realize that the yelling, internal parental voice may not allow such willingness or acceptance.

Still, as always, this is it. And *it*- existence- consistently includes dirt and disarray.

Besides, noticed or not, order is already here. It just happens to include pet hair and scattered piles and disorganization.

So fighting grunginess less, and letting mess have us more, might bring a truer calm and a truthier truth.

Though either is as good a way to spend our life times as any.

We can’t get this wrong.

Which is pretty darn

Neat

When we think about it.

And no scrubbing required.

"Chaos is always losing, but never defeated."

~Alan Watts

"In human beings,
There is a need
To create order
Out of what is
Perceived to be chaos.
This ordering mechanism is
The mind.
As such, the mind seeks causes
To explain what it
Doesn’t understand.
Is the carrot the cause of the chicken soup
Or is it the chicken
Or is it the broth
Or is it the cook?
With the apperception that

Everything is perfect as it is, tha
Everything causes everything else,
The mind, as fixer,
As judge, As organizer,
Loses its relevance."

~Wu Hsin

CRAZY

November 5, 2024

"If you walk up to a thousand of your closest friends and ask them if they think reality is real, they will probably all agree that reality is, in fact, real, and that you are, in fact, a dipshit."

~Jed McKenna

Online recently, where of course conversations are always perfectly sane and rational, someone wrote the not-original-to-them idea that the world doesn't exist and there is nothing but illusion, including us.

This writer was promptly called crazy and psychotic for their trouble.

It seems one thing all humans are experts in, is an idea of what constitutes "crazy."

And for most folks in this obviously-here world, to say that there is no self and nothing real sets off cuckoo alarm bells.

People get agitated when faced with considering that they might not exist.

As if there's a threat to survival if the all-important Me might not be real.

"Ridiculous!" they say, pointing in the direction of their own chest and then yours. "I'm right here, you're right there!" Then they trot out the usual examples of speeding buses and jumping off roofs and seeing with their own eyes, and touching things that obviously could only be felt because they existed, and feelings in the body, and photographs, and other people agreeing, etc etc etc.

A million years ago I worked as a psychologist in an institution for schizophrenics. Those patients saw things that weren't there, while absolutely convinced they were. They held conversations with people that weren't there, pointed to receivers in their heads that weren't there, heard voices that weren't there.

We called them mad and they were put away for it.

That was an opposite kind of insane than the recent online commenters were insisting on.

The schizophrenics I worked with were considered crazy for seeing things that *weren't* there.

The recent online folks were saying it's bonkers to not see something (reality and the self) that obviously *IS* there.

So which is it- is it psychotic TO see or to NOT see things that aren't real?

Hmmm.

Yet both versions of "crazy" share a commonality too.

Because when it comes to the, "There is a self and there is a world and if you don't see it you're nuts" conversation,

the proof that is always given- the proof of sanity, reality, existence- always seems to depend on there being a perceiver, perceiving.

As in- we see things. We feel things. We think things.

Just like my former patients.

We're convinced they're real.

Just like my former patients.

See a pen and pick it up. "The pen is real," we say.

Even though that pen exists in *our* eyeballs and fingertips, not provably outside them.

This is what we call "reality" – those personal perceptions.

And then this individualized sense of actuality requires belief - a belief that human senses and thoughts indicate something other than us, something outside us, something that maintains and continues on without us.

Something which is most certainly there all the time, and is most certainly solid, and most certainly continues to exist even after it's no longer perceived.

Close our eyes, the pen disappears.

We insist it is still there.

Based on our perception and an idea, we are completely certain about what's actual and what's imagined.

There is no other proof.

Turns out, what is used to prove our existence, is our existence.

Yeah that's not nuts at all.

Perhaps you can see that it's completely illogical, batty even, to define existence based on variable and fluctuating human perceptions, thoughts, and experiences.

Perhaps you can see that if that's our version of sane,

If that's where we live,

in that movable, varies-from-person-to-person, depends-on-the-light-and-time-of-day, unsubstantiatable personal fiction-

then reality is not real.

"Reality" is variable, and it depends on us.

In which case, the road to crazy-town is short.

Because we already live there.

"What i thought was unreal now, for me, seems in some ways to be more real than what I think to be real, which seems now to be unreal.

You can't have a universe without mind entering into it. The mind is actually shaping the very thing that is being perceived. Reality gets created through acts of observation."

~Physicist Fred Alan Wolf

"We are nothing but images of images. Reality, including ourselves, is nothing but a thin and fragile veil, beyond which … there is nothing."

~Physicist Carlo Rovelli

"The objects you see are your invention. You create them with a glance and destroy them with a blink. You have worn this virtual reality headset all your life. What happens if you take it off?"

~Donald Hoffman

"All we know of the world is the perceiving of it.
We don't actually know a world, we just know perception.

And how close is perception to the one who knows it? Ask yourself now:
All you know of this room is the seeing of it, yes?
All you know is the experience of seeing.
What does ‘I' mean without a reference to something that might not be ‘I'?
It doesn't mean anything. It's an abstract sound. It means nothing.
Even the ‘I' refers to ‘something' which is different from the ‘not-I'.
So then, here, the mind falls silent.
It cannot describe the nature of reality.
It just doesn't have the language.
It's not the right tool."

~Rupert Spira

"The world doesn't exist and we come to see that clearly. It's all an illusion. It never did exist. There is No One and Nothing. It's literal. Are you ready to live without a world? Are you willing to lose the moon?"

~Byron Katie

THE PAST

November 12, 2024

"We tend to regard ourselves as puppets of the past, driven along by something that is always behind us."

~Alan Watts

"If the past cannot prevent you from being present now, what power does it have?"

~Eckhart Tolle

"Therapists have told patients that, 'The body remembers what the mind forgets,' and that memories and traumas are recorded in cellular DNA. Absolutely no scientific evidence supports these notions."

~Aaron T. Beck, MD

I remember playing at the beach at 5, wearing my cousin's red bathing suit. I remember being bullied. I remember painting with my grandfather, getting a D in every high school class just to piss off my mother, being jealous of my friend's normal family. I remember panic attacks in college, dancing in the high school play, singing "O Holy Night" for 2nd grade auditorium. I

remember depression, enlightenment experiences, fights with boyfriends, money fears, triumphs and pats on the back, my grandmother's cookies.

Memories. I've got 'em. You do too.

We have a past, a history. And the memories to prove it.

Because the past did happen, right? I mean, look, there are even photos- here's a little girl at a beach wearing a red bathing suit.

So what are they, these memories, these provers of reality and past?

Well, they're images. We say, "I was at the beach," and mentally see the beach.

We see it *now*. Sitting in a chair at home, thinking about the beach.

That is not a real beach. We can't swim there. That's mental pixels.

Even "real" proofs of the past, like photographs or videos, are also images. They are also not the past, not the beach, not our parents, not soldiers, not 1910.

They are stand-ins, indications, representations, *of* a past.

So where's the real thing?

Oh dear. Maybe we're hallucinating it? I mean, per Mr. Webster: "Hallucinate: to experience a seemingly real perception of something not actually present."

Hmmmm. Apparently all of us are indeed mass-hallucinating and buying into images of something not actually present, as if they are real.

Because the past itself does not exist. It's a picture.

Otherwise, if the past is a real thing, where did it go, where is it now? What does it look like when it shows up for a visit?

It seems humans hallucinate *all the time*. Even the *NOW,* that much-vaunted present, is also a hallucination.

But that may be harder to see.

It's just that we don't think of the present as formative. Whereas almost everyone believes the past created us and made us who we are.

Even though whatever happened, whatever we lived through, was only known by colors and shapes appearing in *our own* eyeballs, sounds falling on *our own* ears, sensations occurring in *our own* fingertips.

Experiences depending on us. Happening to us alone. Here in that moment (if at all) and then gone.

Nonexistent unless we perceive it.

And then, from these personal perceptions, we make inferences, meaning, convictions and absolute certainties of reality.

And of ourselves.

So naturally we're going to hold onto a few of those. We're going to call them *memories,* and *the past,* and *trauma,* and *life story.*

We're going to tell those stories as explanations of things happening today.

And we're all going to pretend these past experiences are here still, held in us somewhere, stuck in there forever, directing current life like some kind of miniature mad-person in the forehead, waiting to come out at the most inconvenient times later.

"It was terrible and it made me who I am today." "I still have dreams about my parents- they still affect me today, though they are long gone."

Creating the *Me*.

Perceptions and memories and histories are how we prove we exist.

As a person.

Humans reify hallucinations in order to verify who we are. A whole person, a whole *Me,* is built around them.

Because without a past, what's left? What are we?

Could it be *nothing?*

Oh dear.

Better to put the past on a pedestal, honor it, study it, enshrine it with memory, call it reality, and think it means something.

And then hold on tight.

Never ever release it.

Even if it hurts.

Ok but ugh, for crying out loud, Mind-Tickler, who cares? What good does all this theoretical blather about the past and memory and hallucination do for anyone anyway? No one needs this.

Yes of course that's true.

It's true we have to live in this world. We can't wipe out stories of little girls in red bathing suits.

We can't wipe out Hitler and radiation and dinosaurs and yesterday and deceased family members.

The illusion must continue. Hallucinations are required. It is necessary to buy in.

There really is no alternative.

It's just that untethering from the usual certainties, even just a little, can bring surprises.

If we are willing to consider that, “Once upon a time” is not reality, never has been what we are, and hasn’t necessarily even *created* what we are-

because really how can any image create a person- especially a person *later-*

well then who knows? The next realization might be that we’re not weighted down by what we think we are, at all.

We might discover that if we’re only story, then we’re nothing at all.

Which is something a lot of Mind-tickler readers really want to understand.

The past is an imaginary leash.

Unchain from that anchor, with all its trauma, suffering, and heaviness pinning the self down,

And there may be nothing left to hold the usual balloon of *Me* from floating free.

Which just might be something,

if we can remember,

to hold onto

Lightly.

"We think that the world is limited and explained by its past. We tend to think that what happened in the past determines what is going to happen next, and we do not see that it is exactly the other way around! What is always the source of the world is the present; the past doesn't explain a thing. The past trails behind the present like the wake of a ship and eventually disappears."

~Alan Watts

"There is neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will be also the present when you experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."

~Ramana Maharshi

"The self cannot be given up as long as
One is self indulgent.
One who is bound to his tendencies,
To his past, his viewpoint,
To his commitments to things in the world,
To his acceptance of life in separation,
Cannot realize,
Cannot recognize."

~Wu Hsin

TOUGH TIMES

November 19, 2024

"The character is made out of the screen and yet knows nothing of the screen."

~Rupert Spira

"Do you want to know my secret? This is my secret. I don't mind what happens."

~J. Krishnamurti

"You need not strain towards the future- the future will come to you on its own."

~Nisargadatta

Lately, lots of people are feeling very stressed about events happening in the world. There are upsetting things, changing things, not-okay things. The future looks scary, dread-filled, and bleak.

For some spiritual folks, if they can't control outside happenings (*which is really what is wanted*), then they'd like to at least not mind what happens, ala Krishnamurti. *(see famous quote above)*. Then they wouldn't have to be afraid. They'd be able to at least stay calm.

Because for the most part, no one is a fan of fear, panic, depression or dread.

But in general, that's not happening. Folks *are* afraid. Folks *aren't* calm.

So when intensity is as present as it has been lately, the blissed-out state of enlightened consciousness starts to sound pretty darned sweet.

Hey, enlightenment! Step up and provide a little calm happy spaciousness in the face of world events, OK?

If not, what good is it?

Current events would seem to provide perfect opportunities to learn to not let outside circumstances dictate internal experience. *C'mon, inner peace!*

Although this "outside circumstances" business does get a little confusing.

Because y'know, "outside" of what?

Outside of the real world, whatever that is? Outside the dream world, which is also, um, what?

Are we aiming for calm at all times in the dream, or the real?

Not to mention, which is which? Will the real world, the not-dream world, please stand up?

I mean, maybe it's clear we're the screen and not the movie on it, ala Rupert Spira. But when the movie involves us no longer breathing, isn't it the real world which is slipping away?

In which world are we supposed to not mind what happens?

As an alternative, maybe the self could be allowed- or even expected- to react to "real-world" difficult situations without being a robot, and *also* see the dream of that non-self.

That might be good enough.

And then going a bit further, we could take 60 seconds once in a while to check if there's any peace *coexisting* with fear or dread.

Finally ignoring the very strong pull towards feelings for just a few seconds,

To see if we can locate, as in literally *find,* that part of us that knows it's ok- whether we feel miserable feelings or not.

Seeing if peace is already present, even when we're out of our minds with agitation and fear.

Acknowledging okness.

Even when terror shows up. Even when dread darkens the room.

Instead of prioritizing feelings we don't even like.

Taking a few moments to look.

Oh my.

Could it be that calm-at-all-times thing so many want, is already happening?

Could it be there's a "part" of us which *already* doesn't mind what happens?

It's just been obscured or shouted over by feelings- trembling, or heaviness, or panic, or shaking a fist and saying, "Noooooo!"

Turns out, *Not Minding What Happens* may not mean staying stupid-calm at all times in the face of extreme experiences.

It may instead mean noticing that which is OK *even smack in the middle* of the character's great dramas.

Perhaps this is what teachers mean when they claim they never get angry, even though to observing mere mortals, they sure do look ticked off.

And if we too experience both the *not ok* and the *ok*, the stressed and the peaceful-

simultaneously-

Then that makes us just like Krishnamurti and those other teachers.

Yep. Us. Same as Krishnamurti.

I know, I know; blasphemy.

But still, perhaps true.

Regardless of whether we know or admit it.

Which means that all the effort that's gone into figuring out enlightenment may have been a charming but unnecessary struggle to gain...

what is already present.

Even better, this separate self - the one that suffers and has political opinions and wishes things were different and feels like something isn't right-

this separate self is actually the only way anyone can experience anything here in being-alive-human world.

Reactions and preferences and "minding" are all part of that pageantry.

What a relief to not have to stop minding what happens.

In the dream, awake to the dream, or witnessing the dream...

We get to experience both minding and not-minding.

Lucky, wide-eyed, outraged, terrified humans

watching the news with all kinds of feelings.

We get

to have it

all.

"What we're looking for is already this. But it is seen by no one. It's possible that something will be seen. But it won't be 'you' that sees it; it will just be seen."

~Tony Parsons

"So sweetheart, close your eyes, go back and experience that again. Respectfully go back to that (you) who is crying and crying and thinks it'll never end.

Now, experience her, be there, be that.

Now within that experience, locate that part of you that is okay. The part of you that knew it was okay.

Yes, that one is never fooled. That one is watching the child throw her tantrum, and waiting for her to gather herself up, and to continue, and to get real.

You can't fool that one, can you honey? It's a presence that's always with you.

Let that one grow. Grow into that one.

So sweetheart, in your wildest anger? Begin to develop the habit of locating that one.

You can be in the middle of a rage, and that one is going, “Ho-hum. When are we going to have dinner?” while your body is screaming in rage.

So when you can locate that one, you can just burst out laughing.

Because you simply do not believe yourself."

~Byron Katie

DON'T KNOW

November 26, 2024

"The mind usually says, 'I know, I know, I know.' But the 'don't-know mind' is where wisdom lives."

~Byron Katie

"You can learn only if you do not know."

~J. Krishnamurti

"Start with 'I don't know.' Why not start where you'll end up anyway?"

~Adyashanti

In my work, usually by the time someone becomes a client, they have already tried every therapy, every inquiry, every meditation and guru. Nothing has worked, and here they are still unmotivated, still anxious, still depressed, riddled with guilt, shame and regret, addicted, unable to get out of bed.

Making my weird what-the-hell-just-happened ways the end of the road for them.

Naturally these folks are desperate for something different, and lucky for us both, they're too exhausted to fight when they encounter it.

Which means new things can and do happen.

At the same time, in any moment there have always been one or two clients who spend their sessions with me fighting and refusing whatever help comes their way.

So as maybe you can imagine, I'm tired.

I'm tired of people begging for help and then arguing wand knowing better when they receive it.

I'm tired of the change-of-subject word "but," as in, *Well yes I suppose I do feel better but this is incorrect anyway.*

I'm tired of folks honoring and validating feelings they hate, and doing everything possible to keep their pain, because they're absolutely certain that's the right way.

I'm tired of the torrents of words unendingly describing misery and conviction, instead of simple answers to simple questions.

Lovely reader, maybe you are also wanting some kind of relief and not finding it.

Maybe you are tired too.

Tired of being certain you know what's right, or what is happening, or what you need to do. Tired of believing every voice that tells you who you are, what you should be, what is real, what is important.

So the question is, when is it time for *Don't Know* to kick in?

I mean, everyone knows an open mind is needed for new info to enter. Nothing can enter a closed door.

When do you give up, when do you give in, when do you surrender to knowing absolutely nothing?

That would be different, wouldn't it?

"I don't know."

"I don't know if I'm right about me or others or politics or climate change. I don't know if this is a bad feeling, even though I think it is. I don't know if there is a self or free will or death. I don't know what consciousness is, I don't know what I am, I don't know what's true, I don't know what should happen.

I don't know anything. I am willing to find out."

Maybe you can feel a bit of spaciousness, a little bit of sigh, just from reading these words.

Because really there's only one way to get some space between yourself and feelings you don't want, yourself and tormenting thoughts, your self and enlightenment (whatever that might be for you.)

And that's an open mind.

Yet oddly, *Don't Know* might be the one thing you haven't tried.

Ever wonder why not? After all, it seems simple enough, right? What's the big deal in being willing to not know?

Well let's face it, once that door is opened, who knows what will slip out and be lost forever.

Loosen the grip on being certain and, who or what are you? What's left, without, "I know?"

That open escape route might lead to discovering just how gauzy this self-thing actually is.

Maybe it's better to suffer for a lifetime than consider that everything you know about yourself, I mean *everything*- your life, your body, your nature, your history- has been fiction.

Apparently the sense of self, the sense of who you are, would rather be sure of things and hurt, than to give in to uncertainty, know nothing, and feel better.

In which case, thoughts like, *I already know this, this is wrong, this won't work,* do the job nicely.

As do miserable feelings like depression, anxiety, and shame.

They protect the self from possible disolution.

Luckily all of that is just more certainty.

Luckily all of that can be answered with *Don't Know.*

So am I right about any of this? I don't know.

Is there anything of value even when there's a closed stuck door and lots of pain? I don't know.

Am I tired? I don't know.

Do I know anything about anything? I don't know.

And with that, a door opens.

And something breathes.

Something relaxes.

Something lets go.

What is it?

Don't know.

"In the end, nobody can let go of the cliff for us. We have to do it for ourselves."

~Gary Tzu

"It will do you no harm to find yourself ridiculous.
Resign yourself to be the fool you are."

~T.S. Eliot

"To be free is
To know that
One does not know."

~Wu Hsin

THE POINT IS THIS

December 3, 2024

"The meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves."

~Alan Watts

"Nothing happens next. This is it."

~Zen saying

In your life wanderings, maybe you've personally experienced or encountered the idea that, This is it.

As in, This is all there is.

This still-so-much-work-to-do imperfect life with pain and suffering and not enough safety or health or money or love or enlightenment and far too much fear and sadness and guilt and not knowing what to do.

Ugh.

This better not be it.

And then, ever notice what comes next? After, "This is it?"

"Well what's the point?" is what comes next.

Yay! There it is. My favoritest question. The one that's going to help me afford my yacht.

"What's the point?" as in, "If this is it and I can't get what I want and only what I want, then why be here at all? Why not take my ball and go home?"

If this is it then what's the point of existing, amIright?

It's a tantrum really.

A tantrum of "Don't like!" in answer to, This is it.

Making the timing of the question kind of interesting.

Because as soon as you start to see that there's nothing more than this,

something asks for more,

anyway.

A point. Gimme a point in addition to this.

Meaning This is NOT it.

Nice. Well played.

Conveniently, distractingly, diverting attention from*This is it*to, "This is*it?*"

As in, "Shouldn't there be a better It?"

When you ask this question, you are saying, "Shouldn't the point of life be to have a better-liked life, a better-liked me, and better-liked (by me) others?"

You are saying, "Shouldn't the focus be on the Me- what I am, what I want, what needs improvement, what I do or don't control?"

Keeping attention on the not-enoughness of life.

And keeping the self center-stage and important.

As opposed to being an undistinguished and undistinguishable part of the amorphous, everywhere, equal-opportunity-attention*It*.

Perhaps that's the handy self-serving point of thinking you need a point.

Meanwhile, joy, hardship, terror, love, anger, shame, laughter, and loneliness continue.

Consciousness seems to have no preference for any particular type of experience.

There's no favoring of happy over fear, no preference for contentment over lack.

Which perhaps may be the truer point.

To experience all of it.

Whether liked by some particular human or not.

So perhaps the question might better be, "What isn't the point?"

Since nothing has a point, and everything has a point.

Making needing a point,

pointless.

Luckily, in actuality, no one really cares. No one lies on their deathbed saying, "But I never found the point of life."

Which may be good to remember next time mind starts to pout about not having a point.

So is this all there is?

The only possible answer to that question is YES.

There can be no more Thisness than This.

This is indeed It.

There is no other It.

Existence is pointless, pointed, and all inclusive.

And what's my point?

Oh my friend, surely you know by now

I don't have one.

"This very moment, this very world, this very body is the point. Now. You see? But, if you're seeking something beyond all the time, you never get with it. You're never here...

THIS- the immediate and present experience- is IT, the entire and ultimate point for the existence of a universe.

Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies?"

~Alan Watts

"This is it, kid. This moment is all there is."

~Jacqueline Wood

"You are alive, so be fully alive."

~Wendy Egyoku Nakao

QUESTIONS OF AWAKENING

December 10, 2024

"Tim buys 40 watermelons. Each watermelon weighs 8 pounds. Tim decides to eat 6 of the watermelons. What is the mass of the sun?"

~Anonymous

"The thing that understands more then you do is about to meet your questions. Witness and gently do your facilitation. See what dies in the force of your truth."

~Byron Katie

Today's Mind-Tickler is brought to you by the question mark.

Lots of them, actually.

Not for any grand reason, just for fun.

Who knows? Maybe with some different questions, we can tickle the mind into going some different places.

Will this Mind-Tickler change your life permanently?

Sure! Sure it will!*

The one instruction, if you're going to play along, is to take a moment to truly consider your answers. No glib, *I'm energy!* or *It's my ego!* stuff. Because what the hell is that anyway? Be specific.

The game is to find your own way.

Just know that all gold stars for correct answers will spontaneously shift into nothingness shortly after concluding.

Let's start with your oldest and bestest friend- you.

Whatever that is.

SENSE OF SELF:

Merriam Webster: self: The union of elements (such as body, emotions, thoughts, and sensations) that constitute the individuality and identity of a person

When it comes to your self, what is it that senses it?

Whatever that is, and also whatever it senses, are they the same thing?

Where is the self located? *(Body? Brain?)*

If it's inside either, if the time ever comes to transcend, how does it get out, where does it go, and what happens to whatever is left behind?

I don't know, officer. She was right here a minute ago. Then she suddenly said, "Aha!" And bam! She was gone.

Is the sense of self permanent?

If not, does it come and go?

If so, how can the sense of self ever go away, if the self is permanent?

If the sense of self does leave, where does it go?

What knows it's gone?

If the self is The ME and then it goes away, how can you still be here?

AWARENESS

Merriam Webster: Awareness- the quality or state of being aware

Jed McKenna: Awareness is perfectly impersonal. There's no MY awareness or YOUR awareness, there's only awareness itself.

Gilbert Schultz: Awareness is the ever-present clarity of stable cognition or knowing. Awareness is the word for what it is prior to the one thing we are sure of.

Got that? Oh good.

What is aware?

Is awareness outside you?

Does it need you to know it's there? If you don't know awareness is there, *is* it there?

Does awareness require itself to know it's there?

If you don't stay aware of awareness, does it take its toys and leave?

Is it conscious?

Is our own conscious awareness the same as *the* conscious awareness?

CONSCIOUSNESS

Merriam Webster: Consciousness- the quality or state of being aware

Rupert Spira: Consciousness transitions from "I am something" to "I am nothing," to "I am everything', without ever being or becoming anything but itself.

Fred Alan Wolf: Consciousness is the creative element in the universe. Without it, nothing would appear.

What is consciousness?

Where does it live?

What generates it?

Does consciousness belong to humans? Is it ours?

Is it in the brain? If not and it is outside the brain, how do we know it's there?

If consciousness is everything, then how, or why, would it need anything to change or shift?

SHIFT/ TRANSCENDENCE

Merriam Webster: Shift- to move or change. Transcend: to rise above or go beyond the limits of

Gilbert Schultz: The ocean is the ocean. All the waves, large and small, are an apparent shifting of substance. The substance is H2O. The movement is a quality of H2O. There is no separate shift. The entire ocean is shifting constantly.

When it comes to you, what shifts?

From what, *to* what?

If something can transcend, if it leaves or rises or elevates or shifts, where does that leave you?

What leaves, what is it leaving, and where does it go?

What knows the shift happened?

What transcends the hardware of the brain, and gets outside the brain/ego/personality, in order to "know itself?"

AWAKENING/ ENLIGHTENMENT

Merriam Webster: Enlightenment- a final blessed state marked by the absence of desire or suffering

Awakening- a rousing from sleep; coming into awareness

Jed McKenna: The enlightened state is not, as is commonly supposed, the special state. The unenlightened state is the magical, mysterious, incomprehensible state. Awake is just awake. It's not something more, it's everything less.

If you get enlightenment, is it yours? Do you own it?

What is incomplete without enlightenment? What lacks it?

What needs and wants it?

What knows it doesn't have enlightenment, and how does it know?

If enlightenment isn't here, is it then outside, as in, not included, in the vastness of consciousness?

Does awakening bring instant everyday life transformation? If so, how?

Does awakening at least help you not care about questions like these?

OK! Whew!

Do you need a nap?

If you never see another question mark again, will that be ok with you?

Yeah.

So, may the dust bunnies under the bed magically sweep themselves out. May money appear in your bank account, may all your wounds heal, may your life expectancy extend. May all hard feelings instantly change to joy, leaving your nonexistent self peaceful and transformed.

Because now that these all-important life-changing questions have been attended to, everyday life can transform into something...

Higher. Better. More evolved.

More worth living.

Transcendent.

And of course there's

no question about that.*

**sarcasm*

"The right question is the last question; it leads to the end of questioning."

~Wu Hsin

OVERWHELM

December 17, 2024

Overwhelm:
1) bury or drown beneath a huge mass.
syn: swamp, engulf, bury, deluge

2) defeat completely
syn: vanquish, overpower, overcome, overthrow, suppress, crush

~Merriam-Webster

It's that time of year again. That most wonderful time of *Get Things Done*, via overbooked calendars and extra-long to-do lists.

Lots to do and a holiday deadline to do it all by.

Oh hey there, Overwhelm, come on in. Bring your thought-friends, "Too much! Can't handle! Can't do it all!" Also sending a big howdy to your buddies panic, anxiety, self-disgust, and action-paralysis too.

Plan, clean, cook, bake, buy, wrap. Arrange travel, parties, family dinners, and obligatory socializing.

Above all, be joyous about it, dammit.

Yes, over the top with *whelm*.

A word that turns out to mean the exact same thing as *overwhelm*.

Because at this fine time of the year, why not have two words to say what one word can, making that one word longer and extra-intense for no reason

other than to increase drama.

Much like our To-do List.

So call it overwhelm, as in engulf, drown, overrun, overcome, crush.

And then, pretend there's a legit danger that we can indeed literally be crushed by petty tasks and hope-to-do-'ems.

The self, vanquished. Overcome. Undone.

By chores.

Oh noooooooooo.

I mean, you'd think that all those years spent propping up the self, building that thingy up, doing our best to believe that it's us, would cushion and protect us.

But instead there's frantic panic about the sense of self disappearing under the weight of *The List*. All that carefully cultivated self-control, and well-planned management of the future, just... disintegrating.

Ok. The bad feeling starts to make sense.

Maybe instead, we could notice that overwhelm is just a feeling and a small handful of thoughts. Both of which we're experts at experiencing.

Nothing we can't handle there.

And then shockingly, we might also notice that *nothing on The List actually needs to be done*.

At all.

Yes we think we want to, yes we think we have to.

But in actuality, none of it is necessary.

You know how we can know this? Because year after year, The List doesn't get completed, there are always lots of things still left to do, and yet, life goes on just fine.

So now, right about here, thought may trot out the notion of consequences and a painful future.

"The holidays won't be joyous."

Fine. Is overwhelm joyous? Surely nothing makes your family happier than seeing you drown in petty to-dos.

Or- "The kids will be sad and hate me, there won't be any food, it will be a terrible holiday. This is not how it's supposed to be."

Like humans know how things are supposed to be. Sure, reality proves us wrong over and over, but never mind.

And let's not forget what it means, about us, as a person, if we don't do all the important things on The List.

"*No presents* means I'm a bad parent. *No parties* means I'm unlovable. *No family dinner* means I'm weird, damaged, alone."

Not to mention lazy. And a poor time-manager.

As if the self- aka who we are- is *defined* by whether we bake yams or go to a party or get the kids a toy.

That's a whole lot of self-identity going on there, under the supposed guise of overwhelm.

So is your friendly Mind-Tickler saying don't do anything at holiday time?

Nah. Do 'em. Don't do 'em. Lots of things get done regardless. I mean, try *not* doing them. The body gets up off the couch for some things anyway.

So maybe it's possible to hold The List lightly.

Noticing what we really want to happen vs. what would be nice but not worth the cost of panic.

Because it could turn out that we and our families have more fun and are happier when we are not stressed to the max.

We might take a chance on doing less. Even if only to find out if the self does indeed vanish. Or if it carries on, *regardless* of what gets done.

Who knows? A vanished self might turn out to bring its own gifts-

gifts that might not be wrapped, or on The List at all-

but which are maybe even a joy, anyway.

That could turn out to be

overwhelming.

"When our thoughts and emotions become overwhelming, sometimes
it's best to just stop and do nothing, and just listen."

~Alan Watts

"And the thoughts when you're feeling that feeling---
'This is too much, I can't handle it.'
Oh really.
Is it true? Can I absolutely know it's true?
Test it. And allow them. Test it."

~Byron Katie

GRINCHING THE HOLIDAYS

December 24, 2024

"I hate the radio this time of year because they play 'All I Want For Christmas Is You,' like, every other song. And that's just not enough."

~Bridger Winegar

"What do you need more miracles for?"

~Spinoza

This end-of-year holiday time sure can be a sad, hurting, time of year, no?

Wait, *what?* That's not what we're supposed to say!

We're supposed to talk about holiday cheer and gathered loved ones and family and connectedness and joy.

That would be nice.

If it were true.

Though for many, it isn't.

For vast numbers of people, holidays are stress-filled, disappointing, overwhelming, and a time for noticing what we don't have.

The money we don’t have. The time we don't have. The fun we don’t have. The contentment we don’t have. The family, friends, partners and love we don’t have.

Joy? We don’t have that.

Even when sitting at the holiday table in a room full of people.

Not to mention, others seem to have plenty of love, connection and holiday spirit. There they are at dinner tables and in stores and at parties and on TV, brimming over with their happiness and smiles.

Sure seems like they're not faking it.

Which somehow makes it worse, doesn't it?

Yes, ‘tis the season for leaping suicide rates.

Of course we pretend this isn’t so. But still for so many, there’s that gnawing feeling of “ouch."

Now maybe all this Grinch-ness is shocking. But no one needs The Mind-Tickler to sing the usual *Holidays-Are-A-Happy-Time* songs. We can get that everywhere else.

The fact is, mind latches onto holidays to show how not-enough we are. It gleefully compares ideas of what holidays are supposed to look like, with what our holiday *actually* is- overbusy, broke, inadequate.

We can never win, trying to measure up to an idealized fantasy.

See, because... *fantasy.*

So when comparing to mental images of happy, well-loved, thin, successful people and friend-filled times, yeah, we're going to come up short.

Which is other language for “deficient.”

Joyous, huh? Mmmmm-hmmm.

Ok, so what to do, in order to not be tortured right into the Prozac bottle along with the Martha Stewart eggnog? *(viral recipe: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPrnBb1BEHw)*

Well, maybe we could we experiment with turning to something other than thought and/or feelings, for a change.

If only because looking for peace in the very things torturing us to begin with, might not be the wisest idea.

Fine. How?

Well, one way to leave the crazy for a bit is to play with moving attention away from the self, away from the so-called "inner" for half a minute, and instead moving it outward, say, to the sky, or the moon.

And then, as best you can, and only for fun …

Imagine becoming the sky, or the moon.

From the point of view of that sky/ moon, look back at this planet, at that one home in (your town), and that one person named (your name) there in it...

And watch him or her.

As the moon or sky.

And then from that much bigger, non-human perspective, ask…

“Is that person alone? Is he/she unlovable? Inadequate? Lacking anything?”

Feeling into the answers. Not looking for the right ones. Just listening.

Answers will come.

They might be different from what the human would ordinarily answer.

So who knows? At the least, you might enjoy the vacation from (your name), from the self, for just a moment or two.

That alone might feel very different.

It may even shift the unhappy holiday experience.

No harm in finding out.

And even though thought might say this is stupid, or not enough, or be full of “Yeah buts” and “I already know this"s…

Still, I wish for you and offer here...

This deceptively simple connection with a Bigger-Than-Your-Self point of view.

Because it could just be that there’s simply

No greater gift possible.

"Is there anything in our experience that is ever-present, changeless and knowing?"

~Rupert Spira

"The only thing for sure is that this world is full of wonders."

~Spinoza

NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

December 31, 2024

"Drop the idea of becoming someone, because you already are a masterpiece. You cannot be improved."

~Osho

"What if we said, 'This is the way it is; this is what it means to be human,' and decided to sit down and enjoy the ride?"

~Pema Chödrön

Tomorrow it'll be another new year.

Brand new, coming right up!

Well, ok, the moment isn't even at the same time in all parts of the world, and somehow it looks a whole lot like yesterday's old year... but still.

Time to pretend that something old is ending ('*Bye! Good riddance!)* and that something new is beginning *(Please please please*).

Something better. Something Improved.

Something thinner, richer, healthier, nicer, and more enlightened.

Yep, it's the annual *Pretend-I-Want-To-Fix-Me* time.

Oh yay. Ritualized comparing to an idealized version of how we're supposed to be, and finding ourselves lacking! Whoo hoo!

I mean let's face it, we all know these self things are too fat and too easily agitated or they drink too much or game too much or are too out of shape or are either too busy or too unproductive.

We all know what we need is more self-care and only-necessary pants organized by color tidily in the closet.

That'll do it.

So resolutions are made, with vows that *this* year, proper rules of proper personhood will be properly followed.

Never mind that when we make these resolutions, we completely and 100% know we're not actually going to keep them.

Not for long anyway. Just long enough to keep up the sham.

Oh yes honey, of course we know this. Noticing how many times, how many years, the same resolutions have been made and then quickly broken, we'd have to be idiots otherwise.

Humans pretend to want improvement while actually having zero intention of fixing these messy selves.

Because there's only one thing on this earth that is perfect and unflawed.

Plastic.

We hate plastic.

We also don't even like the fixed-up thing we're supposedly trying to be.

So clearly, improving the self is not the actual intention of these yearly vows.

No, the actual intention is what actually happens.

Which is validation of the wrongness of self.

New Year's is a ritual that shows us, year after year, that we totally *know* we are not what we are pretending to be.

We know we are not this self story. We know we are not the ego, the personality, the overly-well-fed body staring at its phone, reading this Mind-Tickler and perhaps muttering, "*What the hell is she talking about?*"

We know.

Which is why New Year's resolutions are so often privileged, and frivolous, and, year after year, change absolutely nothing.

Because obviously, nothing in this universe cares if any one particular body on planet Earth drinks or smokes or dies at 20 instead of 80.

Nothing needs us fixed. Nothing needs us improved. Nothing finds us lacking as is.

Not even us.

Not actually.

If we did, we'd stick to those resolutions.

Not sure? Curious readers can always check for themselves.

Sense into *whatever you really are*- whatever that is, and however you do it, just being sure to leave it undefined or unnamed for a moment-

Feel in, and see if that essence of what you are is altered by alcohol or chips or closets or money. See if *the real you* -whatever that is- becomes better if the body eats broccoli. See if it needs anyone to be more peaceful, more enlightened, more anything.

See if it agrees that the brilliant person reading this brilliant Mind-Tickler needs improvement of any kind.

Now of course, if one's idea of a good time is to promise to clean the bathroom, or to throw out all the cigarettes, or to sit in lotus position with closed eyes on January 1,

nothing minds if we do *that,* either.

It's just that, rather than an annual *Not Good Enough As Is* day,

New Year's Eve might be a good time for celebrating these messy, dirty, fat and ridiculously imaginary selves.

Being whatever they enjoy pretending to be.

Unimproved and happily being whatever existence may have gotten

exactly the way it likes

Already.

That might be fun to celebrate every year.

I mean, it would certainly be

new.

"It is only when
The very idea of changing is seen
As false that
One can perceive the changeless."

~Wu Hsin

COMMON WISDOM VS. ENLIGHTENMENT

January 7, 2025

"I was six when I saw that everything was God. My sister was a tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that she was God and the milk was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean."

~J.D. Salinger

"Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect."

~Mark Twain

Popular wisdom. Common wisdom.

In English, these are what we call "oxymorons."

(words which contradict each other)

For instance, folks who are into spirituality are inundated with wise quotes which appear to offer help getting outside the box, getting outside the dream.

“Appear” being the operative word.

Take the ever-popular, *I am the witness* concept. Many sages have pronounced this. You know the drill- "I am not the one being watched, I am the watcher, the observer, the one that's aware, the consciousness that knows this or that."

Everyone knows this. *You are consciousness*. Duh.

Most folks accept this notion without question. Maybe you're one of them.

Ok then. Shouldn't you be enlightened? What's the hold-up?

And of course, accepting that What You Are is the witness does feel better. It's more peaceful than thinking that this appearance is you. But feeling more peaceful doesn't make for truth- it just gives you a feeling you like for a while.

The thing is, if you've been striving and yearning and studying to attain enlightenment and yet somehow it continues to be elusive, perhaps that's because the common ways of thinking about it have *perpetuated,* rather than penetrated, illusion.

Maybe the solid sense of a "Me right here" feels so real because all that common wisdom has been pointing in the wrong direction.

That's convenient for the survival of thought but inconvenient if you're wanting out of the box.

Because when you're the one that watches, the one who is aware, the one who "is" or "has" consciousness…

You are still a "one," an entity, a being, a thing. You are still the "I'm right here" center of things.

So whether you're the seer or the seen, you're… *located*.

Which makes for a strong sense of self.

And is the opposite of what you are supposedly seeking.

Fine, what's the alternative?

Well, have you considered that you might be experience itself rather than the experience-*er*? As in, you're the whole kit and caboodle- all of it?

What are you, if you're this thought and then this one and then this sensation and then this color and this sound?

What are you, if you're fluid, second by second presence, moving, shifting?

Experience. Happening.

Notice how diffuse, wordless, un-centered you are.

No need to change thoughts because you *are* them.

No need to get rid of feelings because you are them too. And, what exactly would be left to prefer one feeling over another?

Judgments, rights and wrongs, shoulds, enoughnesses? Poof.

Freedom from "transformation" too, because what transforms, and from what *to* what? When you're every experience, what could you become that you aren't already?

Goodbye stillness, lessons and the path or journey. When you're experience itself, where you going to go where you aren't already?

Particulars don't matter, when you *are* them.

Seems this shift from common-knowledge thinking is not a small thing. It's a difference in focus that changes the entire experience of self.

It's the end of seeking, the end of carrot-chasing, the end of a constant sense of missing out and the failure that accompanies all that.

Step outside the "I am the witness" thought-box, and…

Hello no-thing.

Hello every-thing.

Wow.

You really are some-thing.

"If everything were consciousness, there could be no such thing as consciousness."

~Michael Markham

"I am in all beings. All beings are in me. This is the whole truth. Nothing to embrace, Nothing to relinquish, Nothing to dissolve."

~The Gita (6-4)

REFLECTING YOU (APPROVAL)

January 14, 2025

"As a young child I didn't recognize myself in the glass, and neither do I now, when for a moment I regain my lost innocence. I see the man over there, the too-familiar fellow who lives in that other bathroom behind the looking-glass and seemingly spends all his time staring into this bathroom - that small, dull, circumscribed, particularized, aging, and oh-so-vulnerable gazer - as the opposite in every way of my real Self here. I have never been anything but this ageless, measureless, lucid and altogether immaculate Void: it is unthinkable that I could ever have confused that staring wraith over there with what I plainly perceive myself to be here and now and always!"

~Douglas E. Harding

Do you brush your hair? How about putting on pants in summertime?

What for? Why bother?

How about folding the laundry, checking social media to see if people like your posts, answering, "How are you?" with "Good," even when you're not, checking your scores in a competition?

What's any of that for?

It's not for you, that's for sure. If you were the last human on earth, it's unlikely you would care if your underwear was wrinkled.

Pssst- you care what others think.

Y'know, about you.

Now I realize some of you reading this will say, “Nuh unh, not me.” I realize it’s not cool to admit to caring about this.

And hey, I’m willing to pretend to believe you.

But truth is, you’re *not* cool. You *do* care.*

As does everyone on this planet, no matter how meditated, enlightened, therapized, or inquiried.

Because humans *have* to play to, and wonder about, and check, what other people think about us.

It’s a requirement, not an option.

Maybe not in all circumstances, not about everything, but at least in some.

So maybe you don't care about your hair color and looks, but still try to impress friends with your wild and free lack of caring about hair color and looks. Maybe you're nice when you don’t want to be, or show off all your great nondual understandings to others, or feel embarrassed when you make a mistake or trip on the stairs.

Everyone wants to be seen a certain way, and to control what is seen.

There are no exceptions.

It might get a little less intense as the body gets older. But concern for controlling and impacting what others think you never goes away completely.

Why? Because on your own it’s not possible to see your actual self.

No one has ever seen their own face or backside. No one has ever seen their actual mind, ego, thoughts, personality.

You can't see your self.

Except through symbols and inferences. Except through images. Except through reflections of the Me in the form of other people's thoughts.

Do they think I'm worthy, do they think I'm lovable, do they think I'm talented, smart, kind, funny, mentally together? Do they see I don't care what anyone thinks?

It's the only way you can know who you are.

It's the only way you can know *if* you are.

You are dependent on something which is *not* you, in order to look back and see you.

So sure you'll point to a photo or mirror and say, "That's me."

But photos and thoughts are not a person- they don't eat, sleep, poop.

And you can't be both an image in that mirror and also whatever it's reflecting. There's only one of you.

So those images can't be the self either.

Though they are all you have.

Which perhaps explains why your eyes stay locked on your own face during a Zoom call.

And why it matters that other people think only the right things about you.

Urgently trying to get others to reflect back the carefully curated, image of self you've spent lifetimes building.

You're using other peoples' thoughts as a mirror.

In order to see your self.

In order to reassure that you exist.

Now I realize this may sound like woo woo hyperbole, even though I mean it quite literally.

And of course there's no reason you have see any of it my way.

So just set me straight. Point to the real you, something which is not a reflection or image or someone else's thought.

Show me that real thing. Where is it?

Are you pointing vaguely at a body or head? Skin, bones, blood? Which of those is an actual person?

And what animates that collection of body parts? Whatever it is, isn't that more you than a forehead or collar bone?

Where is *that* then?

And what makes it distinctly you? What is it that provides it with personality?

Perhaps it begins to be clear how dependent your existence is on others' thoughts about you.

Because only something not-you can provide reassurance of the existence of *I'm-right-here!* you.

So to some degree you're always going to care what people think.

That's just how it is.

Does this need to change?

Nah what for?

Fold your underwear or don't, get enlightened or don't, get an impressive job or don't, try for approval or don't.

Nothing cares.

And who knows? There may be a surprising freedom in acknowledging that dependence on reflection and so-called other peoples' so-called thoughts, is the only thing that proves us.

There may be a surprising freedom in seeing that no image, thought, or persona can make nothing into something.

Noticing how you try to control other people's thoughts could turn out to be a great doorway into discovering what's real and what isn't.

Which may make that mirrored reflection you're so used to,

reflect back something very different,

TO something very different.

Poof.

**Any desire you feel to prove that you don't care what people think, actually proves you do care what people think.*

"It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been, was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything—room for grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snowpeaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world."

~Douglas Harding

"Without you, I am nothing at all."

~Michael Markham

TRUE BELIEVER

January 21, 2025

"If something is true, you don't have to believe it. You only have to believe things that are not true."

~Tom Thompson

Today a Loves-Trump friend got curious and left Fox News to check out what another news network showed. She was horrified. How negative the not-Fox station was about Trump, how they featured only stories that made him look bad, how shockingly they were biased against him!

“All they do is lie about Trump! That is not news, that is opinion! You have to be ignorant not to see it. I can’t believe there are so many stupid and gullible people out there! They believe all those obvious lies!” she wrote. *(All quotes and exclamation points free of charge.)*

Meanwhile, a Hates-Trump friend wanders *on* to Fox to see what stories they're telling, to see if they falsify and pretty up and downright hide any info unless it shows Trump in a wonderful light.

She *also* sputters with outrage, she *also* can’t believe people actually believe all those lies, she *also* generously trots out the exclamation points.

“They misconstrue the story line to fit their narrative! Interjecting their personal opinion! It’s so obviously lies! They believe it! How stupid are they? How can anyone still support this evil man?”

Huh. Loves-Trump folks say the exact same word-for-words as Hates-Trump folks.

That's weird.

So who's right? Who tells the truth?

Friends, you can trust only me. And maybe you, if you agree with me. Duh.

OK, to be more accurate, no one is right. Not me, not you, not the other guys. Not no one.

Yes, I'm sorry. I realize it's absolutely certain that what *you* believe is true, and that I am an ignorant idiot for writing such ridiculous nonsense.

I mean, it's called "Truth," for goodness' sake. There's a right answer. Truth is truth. Somebody's right.

Although, if you find yourself angry just from reading these questions, it could be worth wondering why. Why is it so ferociously necessary to know what's true or who's right? What is so fragile that it needs that righteously angry f-you snit if it doesn't get agreement?

Anyway, the thing is, the news on any "side" has to be selectively edited, screened and reduced in some way, because there is simply no way the human mind can take in the vast amount of available info. Data must be made bite-sized so that it can be squeezed into a tidy and manageable human...

point of view.

That requires a sieve, a bias, a perspective. News presenters on any "side" must choose info that will pass through their audience's particular *does-it-fit-here* filter. Everything else is left out or adjusted to fit.

And of course it's not just the news. Every single living moment, humans are eliminating huge tons of data. It can't all be taken in, so all experience must be constantly pushed through a slanted, biased, point-of-view screen. *(There's tons of science about this.)*

Which is why we have zero ability to know what's been left out. We have zero ability to know what we don't know.

We're only as good as the information filtered in.

Which is how one person can look at Donald Trump and see a successful, powerful, superior-gened hero who gets things done, and another sees the *exact same guy* as a bloated, corrupt, lying narcissist who ruins everything he touches.

It's not possible to know what's true. About anything.

It's only possible to believe rather than know.

It’s always just beliefs.

That’s all we have.

We call them facts but they’re only facts to us and to our similarly-biased team, from within the selective filters. To others, those with different filters, those same "facts" are lies.

“Can you believe xyz happened?” “I don’t believe that news station.” “I can’t believe others don’t see it.” “I believe that’s true.”

Beliefs are not facts. Beliefs are not truth.

Beliefs are faith in the filter. They’re trust in the screened, selected experience.

We have nothing without beliefs. Literally nothing.

So humans are drawn like flies to them.

Because the person is defined by its opinions. Because opinions tell us who and what we are. Because points of view give us verification of self.

It's person-al.

So we cling to our perspectives with great urgency. We fight for them, hate others for them, defend, protect, and deify them.

All in the name of rightness and “truth.”

We call this ”trusting our own mind,” and of course we have to do that in order to live in this world.

But in actuality we can’t ever really trust it. It’s biased, slanted and completely blind. At all times.

Lucky for us, seeing that we truly don’t know jack--s---about absolutely anything can create a tiny bit of space, a small opening.

Which can bring some oddly unfamiliar calm. Spaciousness. Peace. Even some clarity.

Still having our many beliefs and opinions, still taking political action, still choosing a side, still pretending to know things.

But knowing that we never ever actually do know “the truth.”

Such a relief.

Which unexpectedly may expand, rather than limit, the mind. Paradoxically giving access to something bigger, truer, and less pin-downable.

Which perhaps is something worth believing in.

Or not.

I don't know.

I mean, that’s a story I can believe.

But hey, that would just

be me.

"What an absurd amount of energy I have been wasting all my life trying to find out how things 'really are', when all the time they weren't."

~Hugh Prather

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality."

~T.S. Eliot

"We rarely hear the inward music but we're all dancing to it nevertheless."

~Rumi

PERMANENT BLISS

January 28, 2025

"Here's a simple test: If it's soothing or comforting, if it's about peace, love, tranquility, silence or bliss; if it's about a brighter future; if it makes you feel good about yourself, boosts your self-esteem, tells you you're okay, tells you everything's just fine the way it is; if it offers to improve or elevate you; if it raises or alters consciousness; if it combats stress or deepens relaxation, or if it's therapeutic or healing, or if it promises happiness or relief from unhappiness, if it's about any of these things, then it's not about waking up. Then it's about living in the dreamstate, not smashing out of it."

~Jed McKenna

"There is a sensation, and you say that you are depressed or unhappy or blissful, jealous, greedy, envious. This labeling brings into existence the one who is translating this sensation."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

The man asks me about permanent bliss.

As in, he wants it.

Really who can blame him- it’s got to be better than the feelings he’s got now.

He’s heard from numerous sources this is an attainable goal.

> "*You can be totally different. You can have an excitement that never swings over to depression. It is the true excitement of finding yourself. Nothing is more exciting than to watch a fear fade from the mind forever. Nothing is more delightful than to possess self-command in a world of chaos. There is no greater inspiration than to know that you have found the true path at last.*"
>
> —Vernon Howard
>
> "*Do you want to know my secret? I don't mind what happens.*"
>
> --J. Krishnamurti

Oh yeah, sounds good.

And it has to be real or there wouldn’t be so many sages promising it.

So thanks Vernon and Krishnamurti and all those Rinpoches, Sri Sris, Maharshis, and others, for confusing the heck out of large numbers of people.

While claiming one thing but living another.

Because apparently no one has actually lived the permanent-bliss-filled life.

Even Krishnamurti, despite that famous quote above, did mind what happens, yelling at students for "not getting it", or encouraging others' celibacy while cheating with his dear friend’s wife for years and then framing said friend for Krishnamurti’s own business problems.

Ok then, Ramana, Nisargadatta, Mooji, Watts? Nope, nope, nope, and nope.

Just humans, reacting and experiencing non-bliss occasionally.

> "*If we could only see how the 'awakened ones' behave behind the scenes, it might shatter many of our spiritual illusions.*"

–Jeff Foster

Oh dear. So they're all liars?

Well, many clearly state that the dream of perpetual bliss does not change one's actual life. But let's face it, mostly folks ignore that or simply don't believe them.

"People expect some miracle to happen,
something to drop from Heaven in a flash.
It's nothing of the sort.
Only the notion that you're the body,
that you're this or that, will go, & you remain as you are."

--Ramana Maharshi

They say it flat out.

So maybe we just misunderstand.

Because most seekers think the self, the ego, the person we think of as ourselves, is what attains the bliss. Enlightenment becomes something outside, something other than us, something we *get*.

And we think we're going to be ourselves, the one who gets it.

"You want to remain as you are, but at the same time, you want to know the Reality. You want to remain in the illusory world and know the Reality. Impossible! Ultimate Reality will not emerge until all body-knowledge has been dissolved."
--Ramana

To not-mind what happens might perhaps be lovely, but we still want it to be *Me* that does the not-minding.

Which is not possible.

"*When will suffering cease? Not until individuality is lost.*"
--Ramana

Wait, individuality gets lost?

Uh oh.

"*Everybody's searching for something.*
Nobody's searching for nothing."

--Michael Markham

Because we *are* the bliss, and we *are* all the other feelings too, and we are every thought and sound and color.

Which means we are fleeting, ephemeral, and not located anywhere.

So there is no *Me*.

No *Me* to claim attainment of bliss, enlightenment or anything else. No Me to prefer one state over another.

We *are* all of it. Including bliss, including reaction, including naughty unsage-like behavior.

"*There is no self apart from the perceiving. Perceiving is all there is.*"

--Adyashanti

On the plus side, we get to be it all.

All experiences, experiencing.

Which is why to chase perpetual bliss is to aim small.

Meanwhile, paradoxically, the falling away of the sense of self might sometimes come with a peace, a love, an equanimity.

And also the sense of self, the person and personality, remains in this life and world. As a person we talk with the spouse, hug the kids, work the job.

We continue to be recognizable as ourselves.

And soon enough that self gets annoyed with the neighbor or the government or traffic or the cable company. Soon enough, that self gets afraid or ashamed or guilty.

The self continues to experience every emotion, continues to react to difficult circumstances.

Which is no problem when we are all of that too.

Still, we can count on it- the self is what minds what happens.

So if we really want to not-mind something, we could play with not-minding that we do mind what happens.

> *"How can the illusory separate self practice something in order to reveal that it is illusory?...The life story that has apparently happened is uniquely and exactly appropriate for each awakening. All is just as it should be, right now. Not because it is a potential for something better, but simply because all that is, is divine expression."*
>
> -- Tony Parsons

Because being everything is as not-small as is possible to be.

And who knows? It could turn out that

being all-encompassing divinity

might just be

pretty dang blissful.

"After enlightenment, the laundry."

~Zen Proverb

"The freedom isn't, 'I have attained enlightenment.' The freedom is, 'My God, there is nobody here to be enlightened. Therefore, there is nobody there to be unenlightened.' That's the light. Only the concept 'me' thinks it needs enlightenment….This whole thing has been a fiction."

~Adyashanti

"It was like this:
you were happy, then you were sad,
then happy again, then not.

It went on.
You were innocent or you were guilty.
Actions were taken, or not.

At times you spoke, at other times you were silent.
Mostly, it seems you were silent -- what could you say?

Now it is almost over.
Like a lover, your life bends down and kisses your life.
It does this not in forgiveness --
between you, there is nothing to forgive --
but with the simple nod of a baker at the moment
he sees the bread is finished with transformation.

Eating, too, is now a thing only for others.
It doesn't matter what they will make of you

or your days: they will be wrong,
they will miss the wrong woman, miss the wrong man,
all the stories they tell will be tales of their own invention.

Your story was this: you were happy, then you were sad,
you slept, you awakened.
Sometimes you ate roasted chestnuts, sometimes persimmons."

~Jane Hirshfield

NEWS OUTRAGE

February 4, 2025

"The illusionary 'I' grabs the feeling and runs with it."

~Gary Tzu

Hellish fires, floods, starving children, displaced migrants. Politics, lies, unfairness, immorality.

There's no lack of situations to stir up strong feelings.

And while the news media has always tried to rile us up, and has always been about fear, drama, and tears,

these days, the business of news is through the roof. You want intensity? Media, social or otherwise, has got yer intensity right here.

Want proof?

"Trump."

See?

Love him or hate him, the man is an attention bonanza. We're drawn in.

Humans love a good outrage.

Require it, actually.

We get high on intensity.

Not high as in, “Wheee!” but souped up, marinated in adrenaline and other body chemicals induced by drama.

And because we’re junkies, we actually *seek out* strong feelings. We gotta have 'em.

Hate, fury, love, despair. We feel most alive when we’re feeling strongly.

As in, “I feel, therefore I exist.”

Even when it’s awful, intensity seems better than its flip side- boredom.

We hate boredom.

And peace, love, stability, even enlightenment- all those feelings we supposedly really really want?

Guess what? After a while, *they’re* borrrriiiing.

Too calm. Too quiet. No problem to solve. Nothing to do. Nothing to think about.

No one can maintain a sense of self like that. Since focus on feeling solidifies the sense of self.

Because when strong feeling is happening, now we're The One Who Feels. Now we're the experiencER.

ME in the center, feeling things.

Intensity tricks us into feeling real, so we don’t notice we’re not.

Which is why there’s a constant craving for strong moods of any kind.

Not that there’s anything wrong with this. It's just a bit delusional. Not to mention exhausting.

Meanwhile, instead, if attention could be moved, however briefly and however reluctantly, away from all that big emotion,

to experience,

rather than the experiencer,

we might discover that that usually ever-present center point, that sense of ME... vanishes.

Enabling a freedom, a decentralization, that the ME will never have.

Which is pretty exciting.

Intense, even.

I mean, an intensity junkie

could get high off that.

"There is no 'you' apart from what you sense, feel, and know."

~Alan Watts

"The body is a safe refuge for the sense of 'me.' It is rarely discovered there."

~Rupert Spira

"Life is suffering."

~Buddha

LOVE CONNECTION

February 11, 2025

"What is this love that we love so much? The love of one ego for another? Of one false self for another? My avatar loves your avatar? My lie loves your lie? Is it a person we love or love itself?"

~Jed McKenna

When I was little, I daydreamed about falling in love and having a happily ever after. I spent hours conjuring my prince- what he looked like, what his name was, what he wore, what candy he'd bring me.

I longed for this. At age 6.

I guess we're never too young to believe that the answer to the perfect life is out there waiting.

And that it would look like love.

Because we humans sure do love romantic love.

We love having someone to keep company with us, share experiences with us, be kind to us, understand us, support us, bring out the best in us.

We love having someone listen to us, hear us, look at us, see us. We love having someone care about us, have a feeling in their chests...

Y'know, about *us*.

I mean, we even love our pets because they love us.

Noticing a pattern here?

Oh no. Say it ain't so, Mind-Tickler.

Say it's not that romantic love turns out to be yet another way just to think about our selves all the time.

Say it's not that love is actually about getting others to be as all-about-me as *we* are.

I mean, when we think about the loves in our lives, does not every one of them come down to, "Do they think about me, do they feel the right things about me, are they nice to me? Am I getting what I need and want?"

And if we think about those situations where love somehow didn't have something to do with us, then we said, "No thanks. I'm outta there and on to someone better. For Me." And then hello break-up, divorce, cheating.

Maybe next time we'll do things righter and find the right one- someone who will take us in better, and give us the validation we deserve.

Someone who will confirm Me.

Someone who will reify this self and put it center stage.

Damn.

We've contorted even love, that great connector of individuals into a greater whole, into a way to enhance and reinforce separate individuality instead.

Which, though convoluted, does make sense really.

Because we seemingly separate personalities do feel a powerful yearning to connect with something greater. We strongly desire that full sense of union, of blending. We long to get back to what we really are, to what *isn't* separate, to what *isn't* individual..

Yet at the same time...

What self-respecting individual really wants to invalidate the Me, lose the ego, "die to the self," and blend into nothing?

Yeah, thanks and no.

Now I know reading this might not be fun. Or dreamy.

In fact, it's the opposite of dreamy.

It's awake-y.

And most often, these personalities don't like that. We'd much rather sleep-in a little longer, please.

Which is why love of any kind feels so darn good.

Because it might be the closest we can get to holding onto that story of Me *and also* feeling part of that whole, that bigger-than-us-something.

Love might be the best we can do to merge somehow and yet still hold onto these *C'mon-I'm-Me* stories of individual.

Certainly back when I was a kid, that connection so full, so all-encompassing, so filling, that I could die from the fullness and bliss-

That's what I actually craved.

Not that I knew that then. I mean, I thought it was Prince Charming I wanted.

And of course 6-year olds are usually not consciously aware of the connection they already have, and already are.

So for all of us seemingly separate persons, thank goodness for love.

Because seeing through self, seeing the wispiness of these apparently personalities, is not for every one.

Love offers apparent individuals a way to come close...

Very close...

Very very close....

Without actually having to meet...

Or kill...

The Buddha.

"This is love:
to fly toward a secret sky,
to cause a hundred veils to fall each moment.
First, to let go of life.
In the end, to take a step without feet;
to regard this world as invisible,
and to disregard what appears to be the self..."

~Rumi

NO I, SAYS I

February 18, 2025

"It takes a lot of energy to not believe in something that doesn't exist."

~Michael Markham

"As long as you think it is somewhere out
there.....somewhere.....that is where it will appear to be."

~Michael Markham

People want to understand the not-I. They want to find the no-I. They want to find the awareness of it.

Where is that sucker? Folks are looking everywhere for it.

Which does raise the question, *why? Why* would anyone feel it's necessary to understand no-self?

Clearly there's an idea that some-thing can be gotten, if only one can see there's no-thing.

Ok. Maybe it would help to ask, *what wants to know*? What gives a darn about this important question?

Well, I'm sorry to report, but that would be the self. It's the self that wants to know.

Self wants to find not-I, by using I to do it.

Naturally, all it ever finds is itself. Over and over and over.

Which makes sense, really. After all, what are the odds that anything would ever truly want to discover its own non-existence?

Slim at best.

And then, whoo hoo! Some folks think they *do* finally get it.

But then they feel depressed, or low, or unmotivated to leave the couch.

Which is often when they start saying things like, "Well, what's the point, if there is no I? Why bother?"

Oh the I feels blue. The I feels worthless, pointless, frustrated, confused.

Yes, it claims to earnestly want to lose itself, and then feels sad when it supposedly succeeds.

Good ol' self, with its many feelings, feeling stuff.

The thing is, feelings come to the one who *has*, the one who *owns,* a body.

Making said body-owner the center of everything important.

Which sounds very self-like, not very not-I, to me.

But ok.

And then, even if we perhaps discover that what we are is consciousness experiencing itself through us,

then there's consciousness and also the I doing the experiencing *for* consciousness.

Meaning there are two things. And surprise! One of those things is the self.

Seems nothing at all can be experienced, except through it.

Making the I very darned important.

As usual.

There is no way to escape the hamster wheel of self. *Because it's what's doing the looking*.

Y'know, for its not-self.

So perhaps there's nothing to lose by trying something off-wheel.

Such as, take the "er" out.

Take the "er" out of feel-er, think-er, own-er of bodies. Take the "er" out of know-er, and connect-er to awareness.

The "er" assumes a do-er, a self-er, a receiver.

Taking the "er" out, de-centers.

Try on the possibility that there is no-thing *doing* the feeling and thinking and witnessing and connecting.

Why would this matter? Well, if there's no "er", then how can experience happen? What's left, without self-ers?

Happenings. Lots and lots and lots of happenings.

Not *knowers* of happenings. Not *awarenesses* of happenings.

Just happenings.

Instead of experience-er of things, it's simply all actual experience.

Thought, sensation, color, sound, understanding. All of it.

The I disappears.

And wouldn't it be something if being decentered-everything

more than makes up for any sense of loss some tiny pinpoint speck of the universe, which thinks everything depends on its happy existence, might feel.

I mean, it’s just possible that being everything is pretty cool,

and that nothing at all misses

that limited, teeny-tiny,

self-important,

pretend-center,

full-of-nothing,

I.

"'ve been searching for years for the ideal place. And I've come to the realization that the only way to find it is to be it."

~Alan Watts

"Matter and consciousness exist only as attempts to describe and have no actual reality at all. We are the sun seeking shadows."

~Michael Markham

SELF PROTECTION PLAN

February 25, 2025

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

~H. L. Mencken

It used to be so much easier to love my friends and family before their political opinions were stabbing fingers in my face 24/7.

People I've known for years, hugged, danced with, toasted over Thanksgiving, people I know to be good folks, kind people of integrity…

Now divided into "sides," into closed camps- with scorn and righteous certainty as requirements for entry, along with some version of the password, "I agree with you!"

You'd think it would take a lot to foment divisiveness among loved ones, considering both teams say the same exact things about the other, both call the other identical names, both blame the other for starting and perpetuating trouble.

But no. No one seems to have any problem screaming at the mirror.

And oh my gosh, the rage. Identical, regardless-of-point-of-view rage.

It's a wonder people can breathe.

And yet not only can folks breathe while spitting fire, they *seek out* the fire, turning every conversation and post into an opportunity to position their

worldview and stoke further fury.

Almost like a *responsibility* to be outraged. Under guise of attempting to convert the other team to our side.

Anger seems necessary. Because of course no action will be taken if we're not out of our head with frenzy.

So we like it. We like the outrage. We look for it, feed on it, join groups to get more of it.

Furious intensity is the mind's idea of a good time. It doesn't want us calm.

Indignation lets us know our position, our stance, our side.

Which, interestingly, are words indicating geography. As in, "Here I am. Here's me taking a stand on this battle ground."

It's called "identity politics" for a reason.

We identify as "me" through opinion.

As well as by association with a side. Because selves without agreeing-other selves are "vulnerable."

Although it's unclear, vulnerable to what? What is protected and made stronger by screaming and side-taking and agreement?

Still, we "defend our position." With keyboard, flags, yelling and pepper spray, we make our presence known.

That old reliable, years-nurtured sense of self- created, guarded, defended and maintained via viewpoint.

That- that sense of who we are- that's something worth fighting for. That's something to defend with everything we've got.

Funny though *(you laughing yet?*), because fury doesn't actually protect anything. Screaming and opinion can't protect anything real.

Which means it's not really the sense of self that is in danger of exposure by disagreement.

In fact we're all for that being seen. We want that seen.

That's why we're so loud about it.

No, what is successfully hidden by rage and point of view, is the *lack* of self.

The quiet, the empty, not-thereness. That wispy not-there no-self.

That's what is really "vulnerable."

Get quiet for a moment, stop defending and screaming our opinions for half a second, and we're truly afraid we'll disappear.

Turns out we'd much rather yell and fight than see that we're not what we think we are.

Which might sound like extreme spiritual blah-blah, till we notice we'll go to any length, including death, not to see this.

Agreement-seeking rage is an obscuring distraction, a basic way the self presents, a core strategy of mind.

Points of view and aligning with tribes pretend to establish our existence.

We cannot allow this to let up.

Which is why fury at disagreement has been around for thousands of years, and is not going to stop being around anytime soon.

So trying to calm down, trying to have a reasonable conversation (with no yelling or name calling), trying to let others have their views without being triggered, is verrrry difficult. Usually it comes with tremendous effort and gritted teeth.

Eventually we use words like, "I can't take it anymore," and resort to the block button to cut out people we used to love and enjoy.

We have to defend the sense of self from those barbarians. It's only right.

Now, I'm not saying this shouldn't happen this way. I'm not saying we should be "spiritual" and focus on positivity or enlightenment or any of that other nonsense. I'm also not saying anyone should try to exist without a point of view, maybe even a strong point of view.

Which is a good thing, because being viewpoint-less is not possible.

And I'm certainly not dismissing the sense of importance of opinion in these times.

It's just that, if we can see the *purpose* served by our points of view, we might be able to do without quite so much self protection.

Only because the ferocious defense of illusion makes us crazy. Hate-filled. Mean.

Delusion makes us less effective, and less able to think straight and find solutions.

Clarity enables us to stand a chance.

And right now, goodness knows we can all use a stance and a chance.

Because in the end, hugging friends and loved ones

rather than cutting them off with hatred,

is what all of us pretend-selves

really want anyway.

"The perception of wrongness is absolutely critical to the perpetuation of the human drama, and the illusion of separateness."

~Jed McKenna

"You may ask why God sometimes hides in the form of horrible people. Remember, that he isn't really doing this to anyone but himself."

~Alan Watts

FULL POTENTIAL

March 4, 2025

"Everyone is in pain because of their striving to achieve something, but no one realizes it. By no more than this instruction, the fortunate one attains tranquility."

~Ashtavakra Gita

"You don't want to be an ordinary person. That is really the problem. It is the most difficult thing to be an ordinary person. Culture demands you must be something other than what you are. That has created a certain momentum -- a tremendous, powerful movement of thought. That's all that it is. Otherwise it has no use."

~U.G. Krishnamurti

"Anything you want to achieve is a self-centered activity."

~J. Krishnamurti

In my work, things often come in waves, and periodically there's an influx of clients whose favorite pain is, “I haven’t reached my full potential. I am a failure.”

It's a popular reason to hate ourselves, this potential business.

Not achieved enough, not there yet, may never be, wasted life, wasted glory. Deserves-to-suffer Loser.

Good ol' potential.

So often sought, for years, decades, lifetimes, and yet so rarely attained.

And to be clear, we're talking about not just potential, folks, but *FULL* potential. The *BEST* potential.

Because it's not enough, if we're smart or talented, to only get a nice little job and be an average weekend-enjoying person supporting a family and doing just enough to have an ordinary life.

No. We have to have the whole sparkling enchilada or none of it is good enough.

Ordinary equals failure.

And why? All because some teacher somewhere long ago, or some parent convinced that only greatness will do for their little one, told us we were special and that it was important-

required, even,

To work. To work *hard*.

And, to turn talent into something.

Grades, money, awards, acclaim, fame, fancy titles.

Something. Get to it.

Never mind that so many kids hear this same story that it's commonplace.

In fact, since almost no one else reaches their Full Potential either, then not reaching that pinnacle is actually the norm. It's as ordinary as breathing.

Y'know- the opposite of special.

Still, the non-Full-Achiever suffers, thinking they alone are failing.

There's only one little problem with this set-up for misery.

Potential, full or otherwise, does not exist.

It's a humans-made-it-up concept which helps no one and ruins perfectly good lives.

Potential is a story of how life *should* be *someday*, an idealized dream, a fantasy future, which never actually arrives.

It's the opposite of presence, the opposite of *Be Here Now,* the opposite of *This Is It*.

Instead, Potential is later, it's future, it's imagination. Potential is, "Let's watch a mental movie of a great someday life and then beat ourselves up for not living up to that fiction."

Can you say, "Horror movie," boys and girls?

And the thing is, it's not even our fantasy. It's someone else's, and we, in our innocence, take it on.

Some earnest teacher says, "This is how you're supposed to live, this is what you're capable of, and you must do what you're capable of."

And not knowing we can question whether capability must actually equal requirement, we believe them.

We adopt *their* standard, *their* dream, and then torture ourselves with *our* inadequacy for the rest of time.

Whole lives evaluated and measured against someone else's dream.

Ouch.

The wild thing too, which most of us ordinary non-achievers would have no way of knowing, is that when those rare and special few actually do reach Full Potential-

the Madonnas and Steve Jobs and Kurt Cobains and Simone Biles and Anthony Bourdains and Nobel Prize winners-

Full Potential turns out to be

not enough.

Because look closely and we discover that those "successful" folks are *also* anxious and inadequate and unhappy. Those same folks *also* experience depression, despair, thoughts of fraud, thoughts of suicide.

Just like us Joe Schmoes.

Potential is not actually *ever* Full.

It's always empty.

As any fantasy story must be.

It's never enough.

Which is may be why that inner voice we all experience- the one that insists we shouldn't settle, we need to do more, and something is clearly wrong with us for not doing more…

maybe that voice needs to finally just shut the hell up.

Because imagine the same exact life we currently have- achievements or non-achievements, here in this moment-

if that life wasn't evaluated on the basis of getting or reaching some mythical story of Potential.

Imagine the same exact life we currently have, if it was enough as it is.

See now, that might be special.

Peaceful.

Full.

Complete.

Who knows?

There just might be potential

In that.

"There is nothing to achieve, there is nowhere to go, there is nothing to be done. We are already divine and we are already perfect - as we are. No improvement is needed, no improvement at all. God never creates anybody imperfect."

~Osho

"Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies?"

~Alan Watts

GOT IT?

March 11, 2025

"To understand it, you must not face it but be it."

~Alan Watts

"Explanations
Do not provide
That which is sought."

~Wu Hsin

It comes up all the time, including in sessions where people are jusssttt about to touch … something new for them…

When *boom*! Thought snaps in and conversation diverts. Diverts in a very particular way, to a very particular topic.

To what, you ask? Well, to the urgently important….

"*Why? Why* does this happen?"

And suddenly explanations spew forth in a torrent. "This is because blah blah, it was caused by blah blah and that's why blah blah."

Something new has dared to show up for a moment.

It brought confusion with it.

And as we all know, confusion is bad.

So quick, wipe it out ASAP with explanations of causation.

Ah, that's better. We understand now.

Yes, we adore pretending we understand things. Anything. Everything. All of our past, and all possible futures. All about the mind, and feelings, and consciousness, and awareness, and enlightenment.

In fact often it appears the only thing worth having in this existence, is *knowing why*. Not-knowing-why clearly will not do.

“Inexplicable” is not welcome.

After all, how can we *realize,* if we don’t realize what’s happening?

Somehow we don’t notice that the explanations actually get us nothing.

I mean, once we supposedly know that xyz happens now because mom looked at us cross-eyed back then, then what? Do we simply avoid crossed-eyes for the rest of our life, since we know all about that now? Will that make life better?

Besides, explanations are useless for exploring anything new. *Why,* along with its sister, *I already know this*, brings nothing except more of the same ol'.

That's stuckness at its finest. Boxed in, uncomfortable, protective, and defensive of the status quo.

That's not what we want.

Hmmm, maybe understanding is not all it’s cracked up to be. Maybe it’s comforting in the moment, while actually creating discomfort for all other moments.

And the thing is, what are we depending on to *do* the job of comprehending, anyway? What needs two and two put together? What is satisfied by answers, calmed by dots connected?

What does the getting?

Understanding involves the mind. Comprehension requires thought.

One can't "realize" in any way but intellectually.

That's book learning, not lived learning. That's parroting, not experiencing.

The search for *why* solidifies the sense of me, the one who's got it, the one who takes it in, the one who grasps the concepts in its hot, important little hands.

We are the holders of all knowing. As if we're holding a goldfinch, caging it, chaining it to its little post...

Yay, it's ours. We got it.

Unsurprisingly, we may start to feel separate from what's held, separate from what's known, separate from experience.

Which never feels good.

Perhaps because it isn't accurate.

But oh well, at least the mighty mind *understands*.

Meanwhile, wouldn't it be different, unfamiliar, *unknown,* to see what might happen, see what would be left,

if somehow we were able to experience without trying to *get* something?

Wouldn't it be fascinating to see what would be left if we could somehow not try to grab ahold of understanding?

We might be surprised to find that all that's left is living. Being. One foot in front of the other. Wood chopped, water carried.

Presence.

Not bothering to comprehend what happens, simply being it instead.

Because as it turns out, the present grasps nothing. It's not holding on to whys, not waiting to get some realizing.

Hello enough-as-it-is.

Hello this-is-it.

Hello, what we've supposedly been seeking all this time.

Turns out understanding is not only unnecessary…

It's in the way.

And settling into the possibility that experience might happen for absolutely no reason whatsoever, then at any point, without explanation,

Something unexpected, something uncontrolled, might fly in or out.

Something surprising, unowned, uncaged, unlimited, and free to roam.

Whatever wants understanding

may just unshackle, and fly the coop.

And there could be nothing left

to care

why.

"To be free is
To know that
One does not know."

~Wu Hsin

"Re-examine all that you have been told... dismiss that which insults your soul."

~Walt Whitman

AFRAID

March 18, 2025

"I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

~T.S. Elliot

"All fear is the fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

"There will always be suffering. But we must not suffer over the suffering."

~Alan Watts

There's a whole lot of fear running through a whole lot of people lately. All over the world, folks are whipped up.

So let's look at how fear is built, for a moment.

"World politics."

Did you catch the mental images that just flashed through? *(You may think you don't see any, but that is EXTREMELY rare. Much more common is that you're so used to mental images that you don't realize you're seeing them.)*

There's that particular face or that plane crash or swarms of crying people in a war zone or an empty bank account or your family homeless.

An emotion floods in. A disliked emotion.

Fear rides in on images like Ben Hur on a chariot.

And the fear feels very important.

As if it's the only thing that matters.

It's not just images in your "mind's eye" either. The same happens when you look at "real" images.

They may be called "real" but they're still pictures OF something, not an actual something.

Attention goes to the representation, to a step removed from the real.

And then, see how many of those images have to do with something that will or might happen later, in the future, someday.

Meanwhile, what is *not* being noticed, while attention is on what-ifs and mental mirages and big feelings? What is obscured by all that terror?

Could it be the actual, literal, right-this-second present?

Consider which is more "real," the actually-occurring present, with you sitting somewhere reading the Mind-Tickler, or the might-happen-someday future?

Notice attention is urgently, desperately, compellingly drawn to the less-real. It's almost irresistible.

Because the self needs and requires thoughts of future and fear.

Because the mind can't do anything with a peaceful present.

If there's no problem in right-this-moment, then there's nothing to think about.

And the self is nothing but thought.

So to notice the ok present is to come dangerously close to noticing the non-existence of your very own self.

Now THAT is scary stuff.

Don't believe me? That's fine, look around you right now.

You ok? *Actually?* See the literal safety in the actually-happening moment?

Notice you don't want to.

Notice you resist, maybe even angrily. Notice this request seems foolish, in denial, ignoring very important things, belittling pain.

And then ask yourself why the mind might be entirely more interested in the supposed future and images than in any actual-in-this-moment okness.

Turns out the self *enjoys, wants, craves, (in a not-noticed way)* drama and fear and representations of a good story.

In order to pull attention away from its non-self.

So, what to do with this info?

Well, when the terror of what's happening in the world or your country or your family situation becomes too much, there's certainly no harm in noticing the actual moment for a few seconds.

There's certainly no harm in taking a moment for respite, even if the pull to fear is very intense and you very much don't want to do it.

After all, are you not allowed even a bit of relief? Must you steep in fear unrelentingly? Is the world better served if you're well and truly terrorized, non-stop?

If you want a bit of feeling better, even in truly terrible situations, pay attention to this literal tiny moment for even a second or two.

Watch the fear momentarily ease.

You can’t experience fear when you attend to the ACTUAL rather than the representation. The safety you’re craving lives in the present right here and now.

Now let's be clear that any relief found this way will almost certainly be temporary.

Most likely the existential terror of no-self will not be forever diffused just by you taking an occasional second or two of noticing the actual present.

But does that mean you mustn't have even that brief relief? You MUST suffer without a break, forever and ever?

Must it be disregarded? Does it not count even a little?

And unexpectedly, it could turn out that simply observing this process, watching mind’s urgent preference for problems and big feelings and fear over peace,

opens a door, loosens something.

Something like wisdom maybe, or sanity.

Which may be just the reset the self needs,

to see its own existence more truly.

And that, dare we say it,

might bring some lightness to a world,

no matter how dark, or scary,

or real,

or not.

"Life is hard. Then you die.
Then they throw dirt in your face.
Then the worms eat you.
Be grateful it happens in that order."

~David Gerrold

"Ram Tzu knows this. . .
The fear never leaves you.
It is part of you
As tied to your center as your breath.
Touch it,
Stroke it
Get to know it well.
As long as you are
It will be with you.
You scream
You shout
You rage
You want quit of it.
You push it away with all your strength.
But hear this. . .
It thrives on all the exercise
You give it.
It gets stronger when
You give it something to push up against.
Left alone it will wither and die.

But you know you can not leave it alone.
You must always fight the fear.
It is your nature to always fight.
Yet sometimes there is Grace . . .
You disappear into it
And there is no longer a battle.
The warrior is gone."

~Wayne Liquorman aka Ram Tzu

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BRAIN

March 25, 2025

As some of you followed at the time, my 87 year-old mom lost it in her last years, as she managed Lewy Body Dementia.

Once, she was a sharp, efficient, capable person, given to successfully crossed-off to-do lists and ready laughter.

And then she became flustered, anxious, irrational and unable to think through even the simplest challenges.

Which of course was hard to watch, as well as sometimes sad, and sometimes alarming, and sometimes exasperating.

It was also fascinating.

Because one of the more common myths about dementia is that people just forget things, and otherwise they're like happy oblivious little kids, unburdened with the basic adult rules of life.

When actually there was not much childlike about my mother in the last few years. Rather, she was belligerent, stubborn, argumentative, and a flat-out liar.

The personality had changed.

As it actually does with us all, depending on context, all the time.

Dementia or not, personality ebbs and flows and adjusts with situations-that's how fluid and not tied to anything real it actually is. The self plays whatever role seems right in each context, making it up as it goes.

Of course most of the time that's not seen.

What dementia can help to make clear is that the personality, the self, the Person,

Is created by the brain.

Not just housed there, in some amorphous sort-of-head-ish area. but actually *created* by it.

Because all those formative stories of our past, the ones that supposedly form and create “Who we are...”

They don't change. My mom’s past was still the same past it always had been.

Yet with dementia, with that exact same story, she was a new person.

So the past had nothing to do with her self.

The ego was easy come, easy go.

Which might conceivably be great news for the seeker of enlightenment.

Except that ironically, along with the loss of the lifelong-honed personality...

Also comes the loss of the highly coveted awareness that would make a wonderful thing of that ego loss.

Turns out that when the brain is damaged, awareness, and awareness *of* awareness, go right out the window.

My mom's brain in its later state could no more see through the illusion of self, or experience the spacious unlocatable vastness of consciousness, than it could solve the problem of how to make a return at Macy's.

Take away the brain’s ability to function properly, and awareness is outta here.

Which means they are tied together. Which means "enlightenment" is tied to a non-essential human experience that is dependent on the health of the limited brain.

Specifically the limited human brain. Since only the human species is afflicted with the idea that just being alive is not enough, and that enlightenment is required, in addition.

I mean awareness might indeed be sitting around waiting for us to be aware of it, to witness it, to transcend the story of self and access something greater than the Me-story...

But even if that's so, thinking is required in order to access it.

So perhaps we might reconsider being in such a hurry to stop thoughts, or change them.

Because we need them.

Just as attaining enlightenment needs the meat in our heads.

Because when the sausage is damaged, bye bye awareness. Bye bye transcendence. Bye bye enlightenment.

All of which just confirms what we've heard a million times from a million sources in a million different words...

That what so many seek is not outside, but rather resides literally, right here, right now.

And we've already got it.

It's already here.

At least for now.

Meanwhile consciousness, whatever that is, enjoyed as good an experience with my mom's damaged brain as with anyone else's functioning one.

Fuzziness? Yes. Sudden unreasoning anger? Yes. Paranoia? Yes. Anxiety? Yes.

Why not?

This is it.

There’s no right way.

This way is good.

We might enjoy it while we can.

Because sausage doesn’t keep forever.

"Enlightenment is really nothing more than a simple epiphany, like remembering where you left your keys or realizing you don’t like soft cheese."

~Jed McKenna

SUFFERING AND PAIN - DON'T LIKE!

April 1, 2025

"Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so."

~Shakespeare

"Only the personal 'I' triggers reactive preferences of likes and dislikes."

~Jac O'Keeffe

I had some oral surgery sometime back. It was about as much fun as you probably imagine.

Pain, swelling, foggy head.

For now, we shall call this "suffering."

Ugh. Don't like.

Part of the aftercare instructions were to eat only very soft foods for 2 weeks. Which might sound like more suffering, until we realize that included mashed potatoes, mac 'n cheese, soft ice cream. I'd been instructed to eat, on doctor's orders, foods I rarely indulge in much, at least without some personal finger-wagging and scolding.

Free pass for me. Like!

Oh, and did I mention the Dr-required "bed-rest", as in- "Try to sleep for 3 days?"

Whoo hoo! Extra like!

Is suffering supposed to be so delightful?

After all, everyone knows suffering is bad. *Don't like* is bad.

In fact, *don't like* is the very definition of bad. *Don't like* EQUALS bad.

Don't like this feeling= this is a bad feeling. Don't like this weather= this is bad weather. Don't like this situation = this is a bad situation.

No way anything we don't like could be good. There can't possibly be any benefit in anything we don't like. Only *like* could be good.

Which is convenient. Almost as if good and bad actually revolve around little ol' me's preferences and evaluations.

As if our likes and dislikes *determine* right, wrong, bad, good.

Y'know, all powerful us. Knowers of good and bad. Creators of worlds.

When actually, regardless of whether suffering is physical or emotional, this automatic equivalence between a happening or sensation and like or dislike and good or bad often makes experience more flat-out miserable.

Because then it's personal.

As in person-al.

As in, likes and dislikes separate us into me and not-me. Me The Sufferer, The one Who experiences, The One Who is different and separate from experience itself.

Which then expands into Me The One Who needs to learn the lesson in this, or The One being punished, or The One unfairly attacked by existence.

Likes and dislikes impose a very small, Me-centered point-of-view on a very vast existence.

Making the sense of self feel solid and real and like a thing. An important thing. A thing which matters very much.

Since after all, it determines good and bad.

Which is fine of course. Unless we don't like suffering.

Which, I'm pretty sure, we don't.

Instead, we could try on the possibility that we what we are is experience itself, sensation itself, happening itself.

Rather than the liker or disliker things are seemingly happening to.

Making the me-story begin to decentralize. Evaluation fizzes out. Likes and don't-likes become irrelevant.

Experience is seen to be What We Are, rather than something happening *to* us.

The sense of a solid self goes pfffft.

Often taking suffering with it.

Because existence has no preferences. Experience is neutral at least, and fond at best, of all happenings.

Including so-called pain and suffering.

Which is not denial, or bypassing, or avoidance.

We still feel, or we don't, we still like, or we dislike. All equal, welcome, happening.

Simply seeing what we really are for a moment.

We have suffering to thank for that glimpse of truth.

Which, for so many seekers of enlightenment,

And for so many folks in pain,

Just might be a very big,

maybe incomprehensibly big,

Like.

"While we may prefer to never have pain, it can nevertheless push us in ways we would not otherwise push ourselves- into a deeper and ultimately more appreciative experience of what it is to be genuinely alive."

~Ezra Bayda

"The Infinite has no preferences.
It kisses both the darkness and
The light equally."

~Wu Hsin

YOUR VALIDATION FROM OTHERS

April 8, 2025

"If you want to make sure that your friend remains unhappy, show them great sympathy."

~Happy Cow

"And so at times we talk, and I pretend to take your struggles seriously, just as I pretended to take my own seriously. Although we pretend, we really shouldn't forget that we are pretending, that we are making up the content of our experience; we are making up the little dramas of our lives."

~Adyashanti

As in, not valid already. Needs to be *made* valid.

Painful feelings, suffering, panic, tears, that ancient trauma that has sucked up huge amounts of time trying to get over- those are supposed to be validated.

Y'know, by moi, and others.

Because you can't make *yourself* valid, right?

Validation requires an additional someone *outside you,*

to legitimize feelings you yourself hate and desperately want to go away.

Though it's not clear how this works, exactly. It's also not clear why anyone would want that.

Because would a sympathetic, “There, there, honey,” legitimize a person or feeling? How about, “I understand your pain? I’m so sorry you’re hurting?”- would that do it?

And do what, exactly? Provide a warm and fuzzy feeling for a bit?

What wants or needs that?

Besides, what do those handful of words actually make valid? Feelings? Story? Past trauma? Self? How is confirming any of that, desirable?

Seems something much prefers to hold onto crappy feelings, verifying and validating of them, than to risk losing them.

The self hates being invalidated.

After all, invalidate it now and the next thing you know, it might be seen to be not there at all.

Which is not ok.

Well, to the non-existent self, anyway.

Better to *confirm* that sucker. Better to make a precious space for it with soothing words, lots of hugs, and a generous supply of tissues.

Better to validate it.

Validation is a way of holding the sense of self in place. Validation equals confirmation. Confirmed selves feel real.

Real is greatly preferred to not-real, when it comes to the sense of self.

Now that's something you can like.

It’s just that it’s never enough.

I mean, if, “I feel your pain” actually succeeded in achieving true contentment, then you wouldn't need to keep seeking it out. One round of said validation would do the trick.

But no, there's a constant ongoing need for more of it.

Necessitating unending therapy and inquiry and sitting with feelings and embodiment and group connectivity classes.

The self, whatever it is, has never been satisfied with any amount of validation it has managed to get.

The longing for endorsement is pretty much bottomless.

Sure it feels nice for a while, and then soon enough you want more again.

Which makes sense. After all, no corroboration is ever going to make what's not-there, there.

So maybe the next time someone appears to invalidate you, maybe just for fun, for curiosity, for novelty,

you might check to see if what you *actually* need in that moment is validation.

Even if it feels strongly like you want it.

Because it could turn out that no one ever needs validation of fairy tales.

It could turn out that you feel much better not holding so tightly to that validated self.

And it could turn out that you get far more of what you actually want

By invalidating validation.

Perhaps more than any, “There there honey, I feel your pain”

And box of tissues

will ever provide.

"You are not satisfied
With the answers
Given by others.
So you come to wu'hsin.
But what you really seek
Are not answers
But confirmation
Of what you think
You already know.
If you were to admit
That you know nothing,
Then I will most gladly answer."

~Wu Hsin

"Nothing real needs to be validated. Only feelings and the story of who you are want validation."

~Tony Parsons

AUTHENTIC TRUE YOU

April 15, 2025

"I am large. I contain multitudes."

~Walt Whitman

"We cannot discover, uncover or recover our true self because it's not covered, it's nonexistent."

~Jed McKenna

There's a lot of instruction and lecturing and certainty out there in self-help-land about authenticity.

They tell us it's a good thing to live and express our real, authentic self. They tell us it's a necessary thing.

They tell us it's a possible thing.

They rarely tell us, though, what this highly-desired, "real, authentic self" thing even is.

Because let's face it, these Me-things fluctuate. They vary based on context, situation, preference, conditioning.

Sometimes the individual self is kind and sometimes it's mean and sometimes it's scared and sometimes it's bold and sometimes it's aware and

sometimes it's oblivious.

No one is the same Me all the time.

Which means it's a temporary, changeable role.

So we're play-acting, image-making, giving a presentation.

"Acting like" oneself.

Not *being* one's actual self. Acting *like* it.

Which sounds more like "fake" than any particularly solid *real* to be authentic about.

I mean, there's no point in being authentic about a fake self.

And yet even so, we often experience a strong desire to experience congruency between some desire to speak or act, and a feeling in the body- the feeling that somehow seems to indicate, "You must say this in order to be true to yourself."

Even though that's just a feeling, a sense, or, to call it by its real name…

A preference.

Could it be this is what authenticity, that highly vaunted state of being which we are supposed to strive for at all times, really comes down to...

A preference for one feeling over another?

Because set aside that preference, and we might notice that nothing real ever requires our expression in order to validate itself.

It's real already. Human expression adds no additional realness.

Because, yknow, real. Regardless of how we feel.

It’s already authentic just fine, thank you very much- it don’t need no stinkin' authenticity.

Authenticity is a meaningless concept whose only purpose is to create a never ending project, something unattainable to strive for.

So Alan Watts may have had it right (as usual) when he said we are all, always, genuine fakes.

Because it's not possible for a false self to ever be authentic.

Now perhaps you can see what this means.

It means since all the facets of the Me are pretend, then it’s possible, and we might as well, have fun with them all.

We can invite every role, even the parts that “feel like” they’re not authentic, to come and read their scripts. We can put on a puppet show, or a neighborhood skit.

Whee! I’ll play Judy, the weird nutty friend who never says what anyone expects.

At least for today.

Who do you want to be? Let’s invite them all!

Bring on smiling self, deceptive self, bored self, angry self, sad self, laughing self. Bring on loving self, aware-and-blissed-out self, and completely-reactive-don’t-get-it self, too.

None of them are an unchangeable real Me. So none have to ever be any different.

And none require us to be true and authentic to any of them.

Meanwhile, whatever it is that contains all the variability making up these individuals…

That is not itself variable.

That is always its authentic, real, true self.

Already.

No human striving necessary.

And it contains…

Multitudes.

So go on. Be a genuine fake like everyone else.

Because *that's*

The real deal.

"Although we pretend, we really shouldn't forget that we are pretending, that we are making up the content of our experience; we are making up the little dramas of our lives. We collude in this ridiculous charade of an illusion pretending that it's real, only to reveal that it's not."

~Adyashanti

"There is no true self and the false self is irrelevant."

~Jed McKenna

NOT THERE YET

April 22, 2025

"The horizon is all around you. Which is a good thing if you're chasin it."

~Michael Markham

"You wander from room to room hunting for the diamond necklace that is already around your neck."

~Rumi

As if the idea of traveling in life to a destination is not simply a metaphor, and a not-helpful metaphor at that, but is instead an actual lived truth.

As if there's any specific *There* to get to, ever. Arriving at the celestial palace at last, in triumph and satisfaction, trumpets blaring.

There!

And as if you, specifically deprived, missing-out you, really *don't* have It yet, may *never* get It.

And wouldn't it be wonderful if only you could get *There* then you'd have it at last.

So let me help with this a little.

Do you have brain damage? Literally have a damaged brain?

Because if not, if you have an uninjured, business-as-usual healthy, functioning brain, basic biology indicates that you do indeed already have *It* and you are indeed already, there.

No journey necessary.

Why?

Because every undamaged human brain has 2 functioning sides, connected by a bridge, over which the sides communicate with each other, all the time, back and forth, back and forth, constantly, even in sleep.

One side, the much louder, more domineering side, houses language, logic, numbers, and what we consider the sense of the self. Essentially this side is home to "the mind." And the sense of who you are.

And the sense *that* you are.

The other side homes a wider sense of "me" which is experienced as intuitive, vast, bodiless, inclusive, accepting, loving, calm, and dare we say it, blissful. This side generates an expanded sense of non-location, a very large spaciousness with no edge.

This is strictly biology. This is how the mechanism is made.*

So can you see then, that what you've been seeking truly is already here, now, as so many teachers have said?

Can you see it may be harder to notice what is already present because the wordy, louder side of the brain overshouts the quieter wordless side,

even while it, again, is well aware of, and in constant communication with, the other side?

It only pretends it doesn't know.

While totally knowing.

Can you see then that it's not a case of one or the other, not either -or, not have-it or don't-have-it,

and certainly not "*I'm not there yet*."

Rather it's both. All. Simultaneously. Always?

So when anxiety or sadness shows up, or disliked feelings of any kind, or racing thoughts,

Or when one side of the brain attributes meaning about you and how messed up you are and how much you need to learn and change and fix,

Another, already-existing "part" of you has already accepted all that with problem-less peace, love, and enoughness?

Personal feeling, personal thought, *AND* impersonal watching, impersonal moreness.

All-important you *AND* much vaster, spacious not-you,

At the same time. Always.

Simultaneously.

Because remember each knows about the other side, each is aware of and knows the other experience. The communication is literally constant.

So it knows.

You know.

That alternate way of experiencing you yearn for is already happening.

All the time.

Right now.

Right there.

There you are.

**There may indeed be more outside this biology, but it doesn't matter. Because without the brain you experience absolutely nothing.*

"I laugh when I think how I once sought paradise as a realm outside of the world of birth. It is the laughter of one who, after having painfully searched for something for a long time, finds it one morning in the pocket of his coat."

~Thich Nhat Hanh

"Humanity is unable to find the only thing that can never be lost."

~Jed McKenna

NOT THE BOSS OF ME

April 29, 2025

"When you can do nothing, what can you do?"

~Zen proverb

Ok so, no one tells you what to do. If you don't take control of your life, who will? You are the manifestor of your destiny, determiner of your future, and no government or politician or power-hungry cabal or wrong-headed parent is going to mess up *your* life, by golly.

Make sure to have “ownership” of decisions, actions, even past choices. If you don't, you're a victim, a loser, a failure.

Besides, if anyone knows what's right, it's you.

Although once you believe you’re the boss of your life, then you have to fight everything that might try to wrest command away. There's no option but to shake an angry fist and furiously scream at whatever may dare attempt to take it out of your hands.

Which leaves you, actually, y'know… powerless. Because actually, y'know... no option.

You are already being controlled, have always been controlled. There has never been any power in your hot little hands.

Whether forced to sit in school, or go to the dentist, or eat the broccoli at dinner, or drive on one side of the road. Whether stopping at red lights, drinking water, eating food, sitting still at church, getting up each morning to be “productive”, working a job whether liked or disliked…

Someone or something else has been the boss of you. You were never in charge of your past, your desires, your thoughts, or what anyone else did or believed. (All that was out of your parents' hands as well, so no point in blaming them.)

Even the "free-thinking" you're so proud of is ruled by whatever sources happen to fit into your personal mental filter.

Which is out of your hands too.

So where is this vaunted control you have, want, deserve?

Fine, but you still want it. You still want to resist with outrage anyone who tries to take that from you.

Meanwhile, ignoring your wishes, life comes and goes as it pleases. Breath happens on its own timetable. The heart beats until it doesn't. Unexpected nice things happen regardless of hopes and dreams. Painful things happen despite careful planning.

Just like always.

Now I realize my saying this might make you really angry. How dare anyone not hold people responsible for all the terrible things going on?

And sure, if pretending to have power when you don't works for you, by all means demand the right to personally have dominion over all the mistakes, idiocies, and pains humans have inflicted for millennia under guise of being in charge.

Make sure to fight against what is inherent and unchangeable in this human existence. Yell at the gods to let them know of your displeasure and non-compliance.

At least all that fury and froth gets you high on drama and selfhood. At least the mind gets an absorption in itself and its ever-so-interesting experiences.

Because yes, the mind is completely entranced by this idea of that it controls what happens.

So enjoy. Make plans. Perpetually try to get your preferred outcomes.

Why not?

Though it's misery-making to insist on throwing fists at what can never be changed.

Might accepting what is non-negotiable be easier? Accepting what is happening anyway, despite you? Allowing a bit of peace with *What Is?*

I mean, it is *What Is* anyway. Whether you fight it or not.

Even though the mind says, "No way! That's just lying down and taking it. How can I get what I want that way?"

Aka- how can the sense of self remain puffed up with its own importance, that way?

Accepting that not one whit of it is up to you lets the air out of the self.

That's what's unacceptable to the mind. *That's* what the rage is about.

It might be easier to deflate the sense of self, let the air out of the fight, than to continually fight to keep ahold

of air.

Because like it or not, something else is already the Boss.

Has always been the Boss.

Of you. Of others. Of what happens.

And there just doesn't seem to be anything

for any one person to gain

by fighting

that.

"You need not do anything.
Remain sitting at your table and listen.
You need not even listen, just wait.
You need not even wait, just learn to be quiet, still & solitary.
& the world will freely offer itself to you, unmasked.
It has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet."

~Kafka

TRANSFORMATION

May 6, 2025

"There is nothing to be done, nothing to think, nowhere to go."

~Adyashanti

Transformation. Everybody wants it in one form or another.

Different life circumstances, different thoughts, better feelings, a little enlightenment.

Everyone wants something else.

Even when things are good we want something better, or more, or new.

And certainly there's no shortage of folks to help us score any of that. Advice is plentiful for getting healthier, making more money, shifting stressful thoughts, finding happiness, seeing through the self, creating "boundaries," finding safety, feeling more peaceful.

You name it, there's a bunch of gurus and methods ready to fix it. Transformation is an industry so enormous it's mind-boggling.

Even though it makes no sense.

Because all over the globe, somehow people haven't noticed that feelings, thoughts, moments and situations *already* transform, every single second, without any intervention, inquiry, understanding, or effort.

So many hours and monies spent trying to effect "changes" that happen on their own, anyway.

Besides, exactly what is this shift we're so intent on?

I mean, change FROM what, and TO what?

Could it be that all this devotion to improvement is just the general sense of dissatisfaction that comes with the self story?

Because dissatisfaction certainly works that way, keeping focus on the illusory self. After all, if this Me thing is inadequate and in need of repair, or if feelings need changing, or if enlightenment needs to "get there," then thought has plenty to keep it happily going.

Otherwise, what is so all-fired important about transformation?

Truly, what for?

Not to mention, what real thing desires all this shifting, anyway? Certainly life, consciousness, awareness, energy, true nature, whatever any of that even is, doesn't need any human to learn or grow or change or "get it".

So maybe this constant rejection of *what is* that humans indulge in, this constant evaluation of what we have, what we are, what we like- maybe it isn't required.

Could it be "transformation" is an obsession of thought, and nothing more?

Could it be however much health or money or approval or enlightenment we already have is enough? Maybe the personality that's here, with all its weird flaws and weird preferences and weird moods, is actually good enough. Maybe the sadnesses, anxieties, angers and other feelings we experience are actually welcomed by existence as is, with no need to "fix" them.

In fact maybe it's always been OK, and we've always been OK, as is, all along.

Even though thought has insisted otherwise for thousands of years.

What would be left to do then, but simply be… satisfied.

Well. That's different.

Of course it's pretty clear that existence has said, "Yes" to our constant trying and hoping for transformation too.

It's just that it's an unending, not-fun game, for us.

Luckily transformation is not a requirement.

We might come to know and understand this.

Or not. It doesn't matter.

Knowing it changes nothing, either way.

Still, we may not have to try so hard.

What a relief.

Radical, even.

A helluva transformation.

One that might just

change everything.

"You are as much extraordinary phenomenon of nature as trees, clouds, the flickering of fire, and the form of a galaxy. You are just like that, and there is nothing wrong with you at all."

~Alan Watts

WHAT I BELIEVE

May 13, 2025

"I don't have something you don't; you believe something I don't."

~Jed McKenna

"Sacred cows make the tastiest hamburger."

~Abbie Hoffman

A dear friend of over 30 years asks me with some frustration, "But what is it you believe? I can't figure it out."

Here he is, no longer knowing where I stand on spiritual things.

Here I am, knowing *his* positions, knowing what he believes. His beliefs are all about love and light and positive thinking and gratitude and surrender. In fact he tells me so, again, for the zillionth time.

It would be so much easier if I could agree with him. I mean, love and rainbows are wonderful things.

They're as good a dream as any to describe how things are.

Even if that viewpoint is not borne out in any version of reality except wishful thinking.

And there my friend sits, patiently waiting for me to answer and meet him in Agreement-Land.

Which I can't. So instead, I change the subject.

Because I'm not prepared to lose a friend.

After all, beliefs define us. They tell us who we are.

As a person.

Who am I? and *What do I believe?* go hand in hand.

"I am the one who believes the world is flat, that politicians kindly work for our best interests, and that lizard people walk among us. And you, you are the one who is wrong. Go stand over there with those other wrong people, and keep your lizard tongue to yourself."

"I belief love is our true nature. I believe we can and must transcend human ego to attain a level of consciousness where awareness is aware of itself at all times."

Beliefs tell us what side we're on, what our position is, where we stand.

All of which are words of location. *Here I am! There you are!*

Beliefs locate the self and provide a sense of realness.

So I get why my friend wants to know mine. He wants to place me.

And of course over the years, he's not the only one who has asked me this question. Some of you lovely readers have asked so often, you've given up all hopes for an answer.

Though if you were paying attention, you've found tons of Judy-beliefs waving hello in these almost-10 years of weekly Mind-Ticklers.

Surprisingly, today for whatever reason, I somehow seem to be in the mood to atone for all that sidestepping.

So here in no particular order are a few random ideas I believe.

They're absolutely useless to absolutely anybody, including me.

But to make them feel special and to pretend they're important, here are also some back-up quotes from much more believable people than moi.

We are nothing.

At most, we're a thought, a sensation, a color, a sound. None of which can actually be literally found. Nothing looking for any of that- no self, no ego, no personality- can be literally found either. What sees that body we think we are? Nothing.

When this is experienced, the sense of self goes poof. Because it has no location. It isn't anywhere.

"We are nothing but images of images. Reality, including ourselves, is nothing but a thin and fragile veil, beyond which … there is nothing." --Carlo Rovelli

"Self-referencing is the mind's tendency to locate itself. When it's realized that there is no self apart from the perceiving, then the tendency to try to find one's Self in any experience, insight, or concept ceases." --Adyashanti

"You are the illusion. If one illusion goes, it is always replaced with another illusion. Why? Because the ending of the illusion is the ending of 'you'. The ending of belief is the ending of 'you'...You think that there is somebody who is thinking your thoughts, somebody who is feeling your feelings. That's the illusion."--U G Krishnamurti

"This is a dream. Because you're really nothing. But this is most incredible nothing. So cheer up! You see?"—Alan Watts

You see? Of course you do.

But-

"Nothingness is really like the nothingness of space, which contains the whole universe. All the sun and the stars and the mountains, and rivers, and the good men and bad men, and the animals, and insects, and the whole bit. All are contained in void. So out of this void comes everything and You Are IT. What else could You BE?"—Alan Watts

In which case,

We are everything.

We are every experience. We are every thought, every word, every sound, every color. When this is experienced, the sense of self goes poof. Because it has no center. It's everywhere.

"I am that. I am the source of all that is, and so are you... We are nothing, let us be all." --Tony Parsons

"You are revealed to be a presence. Presence is not a self in any conventional sense. It has no shape or form, no age or gender. It is an expression of universal being, the formless substance of existence. Presence is not subject to birth or death; it is not of the world of "things." It is the light and radiance of consciousness in which entire worlds arise and pass away." --Adyashanti

We'll never know what consciousness is.

"Consciousness is that in which all experience appears, with which all experience is known and out of which all experience is made." --Rupert Spira

Ok. And what is "that," exactly?

We can surmise and infer, and that's all. We're not capable of seeing outside our brain, our senses, our conditioned filters; we can only know what the limited apparatus allows us to perceive. Anything outside the apparatus can not be known.

We sure have plenty of beliefs about it though.

"Objective reality is just conscious agents, just points of view. Neurons, brains, space … these are just symbols we use, they're not real. It's not that there's a classical brain that does some quantum magic. It's that there's no brain! Quantum mechanics says that classical objects—including brains—don't exist." -- Donald Hoffman

We are being done, 100%.

We have no idea what does the doing, though there's plenty of seems-like-they-know-something beliefs out there. Whatever it is, it ain't us. We love to take credit for choice and responsibility and free will- all of which reassures us of our supposed realness. Despite the infinite amount of proof that none exists.

"Things happen by themselves. If I say "I'm doing it," I miss the miracle." -- Byron Katie

"There is no separate intelligence weaving a destiny, and no choice functioning at any level. This aliveness is nothing being everything. It's just life happening. It's not happening to anyone. There's a whole set of experiences happening here and they're happening in emptiness … they're happening in free fall. They're just what's happening. All there is is life. All there is is beingness." -- Tony Parsons

We are experience. Only.

"What you are basically, deep deep down, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. And you're ALL that, only you're pretending you're not." –Alan Watts

"There are not two things there, there is not somebody who wants to be free from fear. That somebody who wants to be free from fear, IS the fear." -- U.G. Krishnamurti

"Giraffes are giraffing, trees are treeing, stars are starring, clouds are clouding, rain is raining. And people are peopling. And if you don't understand, look at it again." –Alan Watts

So there you go. A handful of Judy beliefs. You're delighted, no doubt.

There are more of course. But you're probably ready to get back to your own.

In fact, all this someone-else's-opinions-in-your-face might even have made you cranky. After all, we like to gather around us only people who believe as we do, excluding others. And you, like my old friend, most likely do not agree with my odd woo-woo viewpoints.

So maybe you're about ready to exclude me at this point.

But of course, no one ever has to agree with me. You have your own soup of beliefs. That's what creates the sense of you. Yours will be different from the belief-soup comprising the sense of me.

Neither of us is right. Because no belief is true.

They're all simply fairy stories we happen to like better than others.

Beliefs are stand-ins, substitutes, consciousness masquerading as a self.

They can change in a flash.

While nothing is actually changed.

Beliefs seem to be necessary though.

Otherwise, poof.

There's nothing left

to have this conversation.

"All supposed knowledge is really belief masquerading as knowledge, and the word for belief masquerading as knowledge is delusion. If everything you think you know is really just belief, and if belief itself

is knowably false, then your entire reality can in no way be distinguished from a dream. There is no truth in the dreamstate because, in truth, there is no dreamstate."

~Jed McKenna

"You'll never wake up from this dream, because you ARE this dream.
And because there is absolutely nothing outside of you, for you to wake up to...
Nothing dreams you, and nothing contains you.
There is no "outside" of you.
You're existence itself - without any opposite, and without any other.
You're miraculous beyond words."

~John Mirra

POWER AND CONTROL

May 20, 2025

"Dear -----, I have watched Alan Watts, Eckhart Tolle and Mooji online. They speak about: there is no doer, no thinker, no knower, etc. What are they talking about? What does it all mean? Is everything spontaneous then? Every action isn't calculated or thought about? We are not really doing anything? I am not really doing this as I type out this question? I feel very confused. Thanks for your time. I look forward to your reply."

~Anonymous

So there I was, dancing away in the middle of a dance competition. Dancing dancing dancing.

And then suddenly coughing coughing coughing.

Why? Well because I mis-swallowed my own spit of course.

And since no one else was hacking up a lung all over their wish-to-escape dance partners,

it had to be a personal problem.

It's a Commandment: *Thou shalt swallow your spit properly. If you don't, that's on you*.

So of course after my mis-swallow, God, the universe, karma, Zeus, Yama - all sitting in some celestial pub making up rules for humans and meting out consequences – stepped in to provide the coughing punishment I deserved.

Because it seems humans have the power and control to cause bad things, aka be at fault,

but then somehow don't have the power and control to sidestep the results.

This is what we call “responsibility.”

We're in charge of success or failure, money in the bank, getting a hole in one, painting a masterpiece, writing brilliantly, the temperature of the planet, and whether polar bears go extinct.

We’re in charge of how we feel and what we think and whether we judge or compare or dislike. We’re even in charge of how “we make” other people feel and think too.

All happenings placed squarely on the me. *I* did this.

That’s how it works. I don’t make the rules.

Cause and effect is completely built-in to the sense of self. Everything is about the Me and what it did and what it caused and what it deserves.

We’ll even *make up* dots to connect if we have to, as long as we’re the center point and cause of what happens.

Although we might notice how heavy all that fault, blame, responsibility, free will and doership are.

It’s heavy heavy stuff.

Which it really needs to be. Since heaviness keeps us from noticing how wispy the self actually is.

The substantialness of the self is enhanced by heaviness.

Sigh. Maybe we could consider a different point of view.

Maybe we could consider- what if it’s actually *not* us doing anything and everything? What if absolutely all happenings are-

literally and completely-

random?

Money, health, spit, failure, personality, feelings.

Random, random, random, random, random, random.

What if there are no actual connecting dots from experience A to result B? What if experience is new every second and has no prior cause or reason?

Now of course no one has to believe any of this. It's just a point of view and a "what if." No harm in trying it on.

It just may be worth playing with, though. Because believing we're in charge of what happens feels awful.

And *random,* though granted, might be almost completely incomprehensible to humans, feels way better. Much lighter. Much more spacious.

We might discover a whole different sense of self, if we play with peeling off faux responsibility and cause-effect from that self's aching back.

We might discover that, just like there is no self, there are also no universe watching *US,* judging *US,* and meting out punishment- to all-important *US*. Perhaps nothing is out there lining up our failures, just waiting to give us the smackdown when we misbehave.

It could even be that we've been free of the ties of good-girl and boy all along, and we just haven't noticed, so bent over have we been, carrying responsibility.

"Random" just may be the key to the unanchored, free-floating self.

Something so many lovely Mind-Tickler readers are looking for.

And who knows- that might be worth swallowing.

"The hand lifts, but you say 'I lift'. The eyes see but you say, 'I see'. The nose smells, but you say, 'I smell'. All this is the power of the Self and yet you say, 'I did it'. That power belongs to God. Who is this ego arrogating 'I'? He has no place in the palace, but once admitted inside, he overrules the king and affirms his own existence. But after some enquiry, this ego's existence is easily disproved. Then the king once again affirms, 'I am Reality.' There is one thing about this condition – there is bliss. If there are two, then there is pain. Where there is One, there is bliss."

~Siddharameshwar Maharaj

"Do you think that I know what I'm doing?
That for one breath or half-breath I belong to myself?
As much as a pen knows what it's writing,
or the ball can guess where it's going next."

~Rumi

BUILD A SELF

May 27, 2025

"Your whole idea about yourself is borrowed; borrowed from those who have no idea of who they are themselves."

~Osho

"Your ideas about yourself change from day to day and from moment to moment. Your self image is the most changeful thing you have."

~Nisargadatta

"'You' and 'he' -- these appear only when 'I' does."

~Bhagavan

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

As one of my parting gifts to you, I thought it might be nice to learn how to build a self. Kinda like Build-a-Bear, and certainly just as adorable.

Because what better gift than creating a you to *BE*.

Since of course there must be a you.

1) Start by locating the self. In order for you to exist, you have to be somewhere. This requires you to be a thing, an object. Being a thing fills space, avoiding scary emptiness and nothingness.

In fact, cover all bases and create an "inside", too. Call that "inner you," your True Self.

It's changeable, though- the Inner Self's thoughts and feelings vary with the weather. So it can't really be the True one. But still.

Creating this inner you enables there to now be 2 somethings, a true and a false self. Yay for extra emptiness-filling!

Even better, now the inside can be filled up with alcohol and food and an inner child requiring unending attention and problem solving.

Nice!

2) Get a past. There has to be a creation backstory. "Here I am, and this is how I got here." Tell that story on repeat. Memorize, reinforce, re-live. Use thoughts and images both mental and physical to prove veracity.

Like #1, this also locates and places you. Without a story of a past, there's no way to exist as anything more than a fleeting current experience (as opposed to an experiencER.) There can simply be no you without the past. So replay for a lifetime, the tale of what is long gone.

If it was ever there.

3) Build in importance. Make self the center of everything- dreams, situations, memories, thoughts. Keep attention on this important thing at all times. Support its significance with fault, guilt, blame, shame, and

responsibility. Because hey, Important-You made the mess, Important-You must fix it.

4) Evaluate. Monitor and keep your eye on the self. How's it doing? Is it OK? Is it good enough? Did it do the right thing, does it know what it's doing, does it need more enlightenment, does it need fixing? Well of course it does. Perfect. Get to fixin.

Evaluate and watch your own self, *with* that very same self. Notice who it's up to, to find and solve the problems of self.

5) Monitor others' thoughts too. Y'know, about *you*. (see #3.) After all, their thoughts have the power to "make you" upset or happy. Which means *their* thoughts make *you*.So regardless of logic or lack thereof, monitor: "Do they like me? Did I impress them, do they think I'm smart, talented, attractive? Do they see me, get me, admire me?"

5a) Attempt to control what others think. About you in particular. Find ways to fool them so they don't discover you're a loser, weak, unlovable, or a failure who never came close to reaching full potential. Whatever that is.

This way, "I'm right about me because others see me and think so too" can be used as further proof of your existence. Never mind those others have an equally urgent investment in believing in you, just like you believe in them.

6) Compare. "Are those others better than I am? Am I ugly compared to them, unliked compared to them, weird, less talented, less enlightened compared to them?" Comparing tells you who *you* are.

Because that's what everything's about.

7) Make the body's senses top priority. See it to believe it. Hear it. Feel those feelings. Surely that contraction in the chest or that dislike of sadness proves something. How do you know you exist? You see, hear, feel.

8) See your self as uniquely suffering, with flaws which are obviously worse than others'. Insist on that uniqueness ("I'm not like other people, I'm weird, others may also be anxious but mine is worse,") while

simultaneously striving extra-hard to be “normal,” and part of some crowd. The right enlightenment group, the right political side, the right sports team. Be part of a tribe, a family of like-minded others.

Because sure you may esteem being special and different but after all, there’s safety in numbers.

9) Try to live up to concepts like meaning, purpose, goals, goodness, rightness, and potential. I’s not clear exactly what these things are- I mean, they’re not even things- but they seem to be necessary.

10) Resist with all you’ve got, anything and everything that might have potential to help see through the mist, the façade, the fakery of all this. Claim to want to understand while arguing fiercely, angrily, dismissively, that of course you exist, you’re RIGHT HERE!

Let fear and annoyance and looking in all the wrong places deter you from noticing nothingness.

After noticing that fear shows up anytime possible emptiness begins to be sensed,("Oh this is scary!), ask, "Then what IS there? What’s real? What am I?” Get stuck there.

Certainly don’t notice or wait for *what might come just after.*

Ok, so, fine. Do you ever have to get this? Do you ever have to stop building this bear?

Of course not. Absolutely nothing needs the self to know whether it’s real or not.

Besides, whatever you are, you are already that anyway.

Known or not, understood or not, seen or not, you’re still whatever you are.

Which may or may not turn out to be nothing.

Luckily, nothing cares.

So you may as well enjoy being a well-built and cuddly bear.

And maybe not much else.

"Our usual attitude is of 'I am this.' Consistently and perseveringly separate the 'I am' from 'this' or 'that' and try to feel what it means to be, without being 'this' or 'that.'"

~Nisargadatta

"...Maybe
It is sacred
Just as it is
Its power and innocence
Require no justification
Its perfection requires no meaning
Maybe nothing
Means anything
Other than what the Rose
Means
When it blooms
It means
Here I am
Here I am
Here I am."

~Maya Luna, partial poem "Senseless Perfection"

SCARY VOID

June 3, 2025

"Nirvāna is not annihilation. It’s not disappearance into a sort of undifferentiated void."

~Alan Watts

"You can only be afraid of what you think you know."

~Jiddu Krishnamurti

"It's always fear beneath the surface, no matter how it manifests. People don't like to have their version of reality f**ked with. Try it if you still need to get it out of your system, but prepare yourself for unpleasant results."

~Jed McKenna

"The fear of no-self is the mother of all fears, the one upon which all others are based. No fear is so small or petty that the fear of no-self isn't at its heart. All fear is ultimately fear of no-self."

~Jed McKenna

Years ago while sitting on my bed, I had what some folks call an awakening experience. This turned out later to be one of several, though I didn't know that then.

I wasn't looking for enlightenment, in fact couldn't care less about making such a thing happen.

Regardless here it was- a sudden knowing that Judy was a hologram. A sudden watching the lifetime movie of creating, projecting and protecting that "Judy" image. Knowing that an image is not a person.

Seeing that Judy had never been more than a dreaming, with no location, no center. Seeing that even what appeared to be her body, and others' bodies, and the cat, and the bed, were false concepts.

If she was anything, she was Experienc*ing*, solidified into an apparent experience-*er*.

All of which literally somehow knocked Judy's non-body right off the bed.

And from the floor, can you guess came next?

Do you imagine it was blissful, peaceful, transcendent?

No.

What came next was fear.

Well, terror, to be more accurate. Big fat unreasoning terror.

After all, I had been a person, a self, with a history, and preferences, and body. I knew who I was.

Ok sure, I didn't like her much, but at least I had the reassurance of knowing who I was dealing with.

And then an unasked-for flash seemed to turn a clear obvious *Me* into a clear obvious *Naught*.

Void. Empty. Nothing.

No self. No me. No Judy.

Gone.

Something that once was, something I could count on with familiarity- good ol' *ME, MY* self- somehow now wasn't.

Eek.

In the years since that time, I've discovered that it's actually very common for folks to be terrified after getting a glimpse that they're not what they thought.

I mean, are we supposed to enjoy being here and then suddenly gone and unfindable? Are we supposed to enjoy that huge new lack where there wasn't lack before?

Though on closer scrutiny, the whole idea is kind of wacky really.

First, because we're saying the self is so powerful that it can - and does- make *itself* disappear just by seeing something.

And second, because, yes, we might mourn the loss of illusion, loss of importance, loss of being center of all things.

But since we've just seen that none of that was ever there to begin with, what exactly has gone missing?

What is afraid of its loss? What is being mourned, and what is mourning?

How nice that fear happens just as we are supposedly being set free of the false burden of self.

Turns out fear is an effective subject-changer, calling attention away from, *"Oh!"* and sending it right back to, "*I'm the one right here, feeling stuff*."

Conveniently resolidifying the sense of self, and bringing us back to the familiar, habitual *Me*.

Reifying the sense of Me once again.

So the panic of, *"Oh no what happens to Me now?"* simply continues the business-as-usual importance of self.

Funnily enough. *(Are you laughing yet?)*

Because of course we're also still here.

Same bed, same past, same personality, same likes and dislikes.

The story of Me carries on.

Nothing is gone.

I mean, where would it go?

Besides, what can be lost if it was never there to begin with?

Not to mention, if we know there's a void, then there's a Me that knows this.

In which case, we're not gone, and therefore, there's no void.

Y'know?

Meanwhile, whatever we are,

whatever that is,

it continues to be what it has always been.

Regardless of whether we suddenly "see through it" or not.

Emptiness is not empty.

There is no void.

Nothingness is not possible.

Because there has to be something, in order for there to be nothing.

Now of course, we're free to be afraid. And of course fear is fine.

It's just perhaps unnecessary, as we see the possible ploy of distraction.

Because even if there is indeed no self, and never has been,

whatever remains is

not nothing.

It might even be the opposite of nothing.

It might even be

quite something.

"That which is unreal never is, and that which is real never is not."

~Krishna

"We are nothing, let us be all."

~Tony Parsons

"Since in reality all is void, Whereon can the dust fall?"

~Hui Neng

"Being nothing, I am all. Everything is me, everything is mine. No me No you! It's all a concept!"

~Nisargadatta

THE LAST MIND-TICKLER

June 10, 2025

"I love talking about nothing. It’s the only thing I know anything about."

~Oscar Wilde

"I'm nothing, and yet I'm all I can think about."

~William Hamilton

"Whatever the image of yourself, it’s a mask and it’s hiding emptiness."

~Adyashanti

"I'm beginning to see why Ramana grew more and more silent over the years."

~Michael Markham

Today is the final Mind-Tickler to show up in your inbox.

They will live on for a while on the IrreverentMind. com website, but that won't necessarily be so, indefinitely. At some point in the next months I'll stop paying for the website, and the Ticklers may vanish forever. (I might do the work to move them to a free site; we'll see.)

This ending of non-dual entertainment delivered right to you for almost 10 years has apparently stirred some thoughts and feelings among some of you lovely readers.

Thank you for all the notes of appreciation, the, "I have enjoyed them so much"es and the, "Sorry to see them go"s.

I'm glad you've enjoyed them, of course. (Over these years, there've been plenty of haters; they've just long been unsubscribed and are unlikely to come back just to tell me how much I suck. So in general the remainers are likers.)

And it seems many of you want more, and are asking if there will be a book.* You want the weekly integration of nonduality into actual, cook-the dinner-get-mad-in-traffic-yell-at-the internet-provider-customer-service-bots everyday life to continue somehow.

As in, maybe you have to lose the emails but hopefully you can gain a book.

Thereby staving off loss.

Not a big loss, of course, not terribly painful. But still a mild sense of deprivation.

After all, you had something. And now you're losing it. There will soon be nothing where something used to be. Something that was, now won't be.

And if there's one thing humans hate, it's lack, loss, emptiness. (OK, there are many things humans hate.)

Webster:
Loss: deficit, shrinkage, absence
Lack: inadequacy, insufficiency, deprivation
Empty: vacant, desolate, unoccupied

Wait. "Unoccupied?" As in, no one there?

Oh hell no.

Nobody home is bad, n'kay? Empty home is bad. No-you-there is bad bad bad.

Which is perhaps why, when it comes to the loss of the Ticklers, some of you lovelies are taking action, making plans, saving emails to a new folder, printing out hardcopies. Solutions are being found.

Potential void, averted.

So then… you notice what this ending (and most other endings too) is actually about, right?

It's not about the Mind-Ticklers.

No. It's about you, baby.

What you have, what you keep, what you know is always there. For *you*. "I'm losing them. What will happen to me? Will I be sad without them? Will I drift off unsupervised into unevolved crazy-town? What can I do about this? What can I replace them with so I don't experience a hole where something used to be?"

Having something. Losing something. Doing something.

Loss puts the self center stage.

Good ol' self, always the star of its own show.

Now to be clear, I'm not saying any of this is bad or should be otherwise. Just that even something as small as, "I'll miss the Mind-Ticklers," is one

more little way to put the ME in the center and verify the importance and existence of self.

It all boils down to the ME.

So much ME in loss.

Naturally the ME doesn't *want* to lose out. The sense of self- (aka you) - hates empty space.

After all, that comes dangerously close to noticing that *it*- (aka you)- is nothing, too.

Emptiness leaves you out. Because remember, "unoccupied."

No thanks. Fill it up, for god's sake. Love, productivity, food, alcohol. Feelings, thoughts, bliss.

Something.

Occupy it.

Even though there's so much science showing that space is never unoccupied. Never ever empty.

The void isn't actually void.

Not even close.

Everything is shockingly full.

Lack isn't possible. It's a concept, and a ridiculous one.

Just thought/mind/ego making up something to pout about.

Nothing can be lost, not even the sense of self – the true hero of this story.

And not even the Mind-Ticklers.

Meanwhile, while trying to fill up rather than empty out, it 's likely that you, a spiritually-inclined reader of the spiritually-inclined Mind-Tickler, are also yearning for the *NOT*-hereness of you and everyone and everything.

You want both.

Fullness and emptiness, self and no-self, nothingness and everythingness.

Lack of self comes with the bonus of connecting the sense of you with spaciousness, with the fullness of everything.

Every apparent loss is just a different, bigger, fuller-ness.

A completeness. Which you already have.

Known or not.

> *Webster:*
> *FULL: adequate, brimming, sufficient, complete, abounding, satiated, satisfied.*

Oh yeah.

So here I hope, with a full, not-empty, heart, that this ending of the Mind-Ticklers helps point you to that celebration...

of empty yet brimming,

of abounding,

of already-here,

completeness and nothingness.

No additional words

or writings

needed.

Sending my very best thoughts and feelings in your general direction.

❤️

*Will there be a book? Possibly. Or not. These days there's more and more *I-don't-wanna* when it comes to writing and talking about non-duality. So we'll all find out together.

"I am like an idiot, my mind is so empty."

~Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

"The usefulness of the cup is its emptiness."

~Bruce Lee

"The empty cup
Has emptiness inside.
What happens to the emptiness
When the cup is smashed?"

~Wu Hsin

"Consciousness transitions from, 'I am something' to, 'I am nothing,' and then from, 'I am nothing' to, 'I am everything,' without ever being or becoming anything but itself."

~Rupert Spira

"There's hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness.
We are lutes, no more no less. If the soundbox is stuffed full of anything, no music.
If the brain and the belly are burning clean
with fasting, every moment a new song comes out of the fire...
Be emptier and cry like reed instruments cry."

~Rumi

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